DEATH IN A DECK-CHAIR

Rough impression of

PRINCE'S BEACH and PRINCE'S BAY

(Population not shown)

DEATH
IN A DECK-CHAIR

by
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INTRODUCTION

Philip Morrison and I were talking in the Club ; it was the solemn hour of 3.30, when the place is nearly deserted. The Civil Servants who crowd it at lunch-time have departed to Whitehall ; the old gentlemen, survivors of a leisured age, have sallied out in search of appetite for tea and dinner. The smoke of cigars, pipes, and cigarettes hangs about the smoking-room and gives it the moral atmosphere of a cathedral where a rite has lately been celebrated with traditional solemnity ; and that, of course, is just what it is.

" Your books are all very well, my dear Kennedy," Philip was saying, " but you must admit things don't happen like that in real life."

" Oh, of course, there are certain rules and conventions——" I began.

" It goes much deeper than that. Come now. You have had actual experience of Police methods——"

" Thank you," said I, " don't forget I'm on the Committee of this Club."

He laughed, but persisted.

" Well, but it is a fact, isn't it, that as a Liaison Officer at the end of the war you did work with the Police ? "

I admitted it.

" I'm sure," he continued, " that even in those melodramatic ' spy ' days, mysteries didn't pan out in the neat ways they do in your books."

" No, of course they didn't," said I. " Freely and frankly I confess that one doesn't meet with nice little problems like chess problems, where you try to provide your readers, fairly and fully, with all the facts, and then at the end you put them together in an unexpected order and show that all the time the Detective was the Murderer."

" In other words," Philip broke in, " they're as much a fake as those chess problems where white mates in one move. You know—the one where you set the board the wrong way round, and the other where you have to prove that you're entitled to take a pawn *en passant*."

" That's more or less it," I agreed. " And equally, since we're on the subject, I'll observe that seldom in real life do those exciting chases occur—where the heroine, clad in silk pyjamas, drives a stolen car across the Alps to rescue the hero from the clutches of drug-fiends."

" Well then," said Philip, " why not write a detective story as it really happens ? "

" What, have a couple of dozen detectives, and no gifted amateur ; and clues that accumulate in the course of investigation, instead of all lying on the floor when the body is found ? "

" That's the rough idea."

" I doubt whether it would suit the public taste," was my final reply, before I turned the talk to the prospects of the Calcutta Cup.

But the idea remained in my mind. Why not take an actual case—or the essential features of one—re-set it in imaginary surroundings, alter the " characters " to outward seeming, and keep only those " characteristics " which bore directly upon the investigation ? I

thought that it would be an interesting experiment ; here is the result of my meditations—I do not say that it is the experiment after all. However that may be, I do not think that any reader could possibly—or at all events, positively—identify a real case as the basis of my story ; certainly I can claim that the characters in it are fictitious. Complete realism, I find, is out of the question ; if a novel pursued each possible clue to its final conclusion, it would run into volumes, and most of it would be a description of tributaries, and not of the main stream of investigation.

One final word ; an eminent critic once took me to task for apparently allowing the " villain " to escape scot-free. I am afraid I am unrepentant ; the final arrest of a criminal is liable, if it be accurately described, to be dull reading—and I confess that I shrink from the alternative, dear to the thriller, of aeroplanes, fire escapes and pistols and all the apparatus familiar to those who have " wi' Wallace bled."

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CHAPTER I

ALL QUIET ON THE SHORE

The August sun blazed down on Prince's Bay.

The tide was nearly at its lowest ebb. A gentle ripple marked its receding margin. Then came a wide, flat belt almost equally divided between low green rocks and flat brownish sand : the latter formed, as it were, busy highroads by which bathers made their way to pleasure without risk of stubbed toes. Inland again, a belt of whiter, drier sand, almost entirely free from rocks, yet not without trace of the sea, marked the limits of land covered by the tide at its height, and yet another belt, soft and silvery and sugar-like, heaped into a low bank a few yards wide, was evidently not covered by the sea for months on end. This last made a kind of barrier between Neptune and the line of " beach huts," from which the municipality derived handsome revenue during the summer months, and which stood in close array at the foot of the chalk cliffs.

Not that these beach huts were the only facilities offered to bathers. Prince's Bay prided itself on the freedom which it allowed to those who visited it primarily for the sake of the bathing. A row of huts would be succeeded by a kind of " esplanade," resting on a stout framework of steel girders. The front of the esplanade formed a pleasant promenade, broken here and there by flights of steps giving access to the

sands, and by clusters of chairs and tables where the hordes of visitors might take their meals *al fresco*, and whilst so doing acquire as much sunburn as the most modern sense of physical respectability permitted.

The landward side of the promenade, close to the tall cliffs, was abandoned to many useful purposes—cafés, fruit stores, and bathing establishments ; for a modest threepence or so, you could hire a little horse-box in which to don a less modest bathing-kit ; your threepence included a warm shower to wash off the salt water, and from your booth you went down direct to the sand underneath the esplanade. Each set of booths was something like a large hangar divided into two main sections—" Men " and " Women "; husband and wife undressed in proper segregation yet might, if they could time their operations well enough, emerge hand in hand on the dusty sand beneath.

This brief description gives but a partial impression of the sea-front at Prince's Bay. In the first place, you must not confuse Prince's Bay with Prince's Beach. There is all the social difference in the world between them. For Prince's Bay is that part of the shore which nestles close to the tall cliffs, and on top of the cliffs are the well-to-do hotels and gardens where trippers find no encouragement—and little entertainment. Prince's Beach on the other hand is backed not by cliffs but by what virtually is the main street : you can lounge on the pavement and listen to a variety of Concert Parties, and cross the road to dance in Wonderland. One char-à-banc after another draws up by the little clock-tower—once so splendid and tall, now sadly shrunk in these sky-scraping days—and disgorges its merry cargo ; they find, most of them, as much as

they want (or can afford) on the flat, crowded stretch of Prince's Beach ; or, more adventurous, they may saunter on the pier and jetty and sample the penny-in-the-slot machines and watch the steamers land their reckless passengers. They may even penetrate to the Swimming Pool which is a kind of half-way house between the Beach and the Bay ; a great semi-circle of concrete wall, where diving boards and chutes and rafts may be enjoyed for a trifling sum, and you can sit in a deck-chair and watch the antics of your friends and acquaintances. The pool projects like a flooded bastion from a corner of the cliffs which the ingenious municipality has converted into a kind of wedding-cake of " select cafés " ; at the bottom is a subterranean den, labelled Corsican or Basque or what not, where bands unceasingly play modern dance tunes, and young men in shirt-sleeves and " modern-tailored " flannel trousers dance with girls on whose faces the powder seems to be not far removed from paste and who strangely enough give the impression that they are wearing fewer clothes than the girls in the pool outside.

Above " Corsica " is an open-air terrace where tea is a matter of sticky cakes and striped umbrellas, and waitresses garbed as though for a musical comedy, and where yet another band is also playing dance tunes but with less expectation of encores or dancers. Above lies yet a third layer, itself composed of a series of tiers, till it comes level with the top of the cliff, and here the exhausted hordes who have climbed up the stone staircases may properly refresh themselves with such plebeian drinks as beer and stout, and yet, like their more aristocratic neighbours on the middle stage, may look down on the bathing-pool and study form at a

glance ; and they regret the obligations of their 'bus tickets, which compel them to depart from Prince's Beach before they can witness the " Moonlight Bathing " advertised by a huge flag above the highest diving-board ; regretful that the fancied enticements are not for such as they, as though the moon could somehow add a naughty charm to scenes which in the hot sunlight revealed little but healthy enjoyment.

We must not linger here, but must make our way back almost to the end of Prince's Bay, where the esplanade peters out in a row of beach huts and a projecting pinnacle of cliff.

At one o'clock on a Sunday, in the height of the summer season, it is difficult even to stand on the cliff's edge and look down on the shore ; for a strong tide of humanity sets inland towards hotel and boarding-house. Even the beach-hut population swells the tide. On week-days they may be content to eat a picnic lunch, in bathing-dresses, on the steps of their huts ; perhaps there is some subtle provision in the " terms " of their boarding-houses which forbids all but the most extravagant to adopt such a course on Sunday. Or perhaps it is a survival of Victorianism, investing the Sunday midday meal with an almost ceremonial importance. Or perhaps a blend of the two ; so that Christians and Jews alike combine economy with a sense of propriety.

The beach is rapidly emptied of humanity. The deck-chairs are still scattered here and there, a few groups of children and grown-ups may still be seen, but closer to the cliffs than to the sea, which also seems to be welcoming a moment of repose in order to find fresh vigour for the afternoon. Though the shore has been

thronged, and though its occupants have found it pleasant, after the morning bathe and frolic, to devour sweets and buns and fruit, there are few traces of paper-bags and the like ; the municipality has a staff equipped with sacks and prongs to collect such litter and preserve the " amenities of Prince's Bay." The bathing establishments are almost deserted and the attendants welcome their midday relief with yawns of satisfaction. The beach photographers have already departed, whether to dark rooms or to lunch remains a mystery. The potentates responsible for checking the revenue from deck-chairs cast them a last glance and hang the insignia of their calling in the booths of the bathing attendants or some yet handier spot.

On the Sunday I have in mind, a chair-man perhaps cast an extra glance at a couple of deck-chairs close to the rocks and well out towards the sea. One was empty and flapped in the gentle breeze ; the other was manifestly occupied by a portly person. The man perhaps made a mental note to keep an eye on those two chairs as the most likely to be carried away by the tide when it had turned. Still, the portly gentleman had paid his due fee ; and it was evident, from the dark wet patch on the canvas that he had but recently bathed ; if he chose to sit on there while his lunch grew cold in his boarding-house and his companions assumed their every-day attire, it was no one's business but his.

Peace, in fact, descended upon Prince's Bay ; and on the occupant of that isolated chair—or isolated from all but its empty companion—a still deeper peace descended, the peace not of Sunday but of " those endless Sabbaths "—assuming, doubtfully enough, that he was " blessed " enough to experience them.

The tide turned, with a little chuckle of anticipation at the thought of its re-conquest of the sands ; the sedater holiday-makers torpidly digested their hot joints, and told their children that they must wait at least an hour and a half before they bathed again ; the orchestras got ready for a strenuous afternoon ; the young women reflected that a bathing-dress had other merits than ease in swimming ; the sun and the attendants and the chair-men and all the rest for whom the search for pleasure meant hard work, reminded themselves that half their labours were over for the day ; the bathing-pool did not trouble to look its best, well aware that its worst would be all too alluring on such a Sunday afternoon. The occupant of that remote deck-chair seemed immune from all emotion ; the wavelets wetted his bare feet, and still he did not stir.

Humanity re-invaded the shore, and peace gave way to frolic and laughter. Stout middle-aged Jews put off again the garments of respectability and revealed themselves a sad sign of the doom that hung over their attractive offspring. Suburban Gentiles, warned by experience, started to boil kettles hours before tea was due. Donkeys and donkey-boys passed almost ashamedly through the throng, as if conscious that Prince's Beach was their proper sphere, not Prince's Bay. Two or three "lads," with banjos and concertinas, climbed on to a kind of tumbril used as a diving-stage at high tide, and improvised a concert party, and when no audience surrounded them, pretended that their sole object was to amuse themselves and not to rival the countless gramophones and portable wireless sets.

The sea crept in. It reached the canvas of the distant

chairs, and still the portly man in the striped bathing-dress lay silent and heedless. On the esplanade a chairman swallowed an oath as he noticed it ; he hurried down the steps and ploughed his weary way across the soft sand.

" 'Ere," he called when he reached the water's edge, " 'ere, you, sir, what yer playin' at ? "

No answer. The man waxed mildly sarcastic, and then grew angry. A couple of men and girls skipping down to bathe a few yards away noticed the incident and paused, and then drew closer.

" Must be asleep, 'Enry," one of them suggested to the attendant.

" Any'ow, I'll get into trouble if he ruins the chair," answered the aggrieved Henry (whose name in fact was George).

The youth who had addressed him splashed his way to the chair, and put out his hand as if to shake the man in it. He stopped short.

" Gawd ! " he said. " Looks to me—'ere, come in, George." And to his companions, " All right, Sid. You and the girls cut along. I'll join you in a brace of shakes."

Needless to say, his instructions were disregarded ; a couple of shrill shrieks made one or two bathers turn their heads. The chair-keeper angrily and vainly asked what was up and then in desperation stepped gallantly into the water and approached the chair.

He too exclaimed, in horror mixed with anger. There was a brief consultation, as a result of which the first bather hurried cliffwards, and at the foot of the steps up to the esplanade shouted incoherently to a bathing attendant at the top.

The shrieks of a couple of girls at the edge of the sea (or of youths either, for that matter) attract little notice at Prince's Bay ; for shrieks are the normal accompaniment of the pleasure of bathing. But a group of four people standing beside a deck-chair, a foot or so deep in water, is a phenomenon which soon attracts a crowd. The elders come to see what their children are looking at, and stay to make sure that they shall see more than their children. By the time that a policeman and a couple of " Municipal Attendants " appeared on the scene, quite a crowd had gathered, and the carrying from the sea to the esplanade of the dead body of an unknown man, clad in a bathing-dress and lying in a deck-chair soaked in what presumably was his own blood, combined the effect of a Punch and Judy Show and a wedding at St. Margaret's, Westminster.

CHAPTER II

WHAT'S IN A BATHING-DRESS?

The cortège made its way slowly to the esplanade, and its burden was lifted with difficulty up the steps. The solitary constable who was in charge of the proceedings was not a little harassed by the circumstances and the excited crowds. When the body was deposited on the floor of the room behind a booth where bathing-tickets were sold, and the door was shut, he removed his helmet and mopped his brow with an anxious air.

"Well, ole man," the bathing-ticket seller addressed him, "this is a pretty go. What's the next move?"

"Ah," said the constable. "Got a telephone here, have you?"

"Not 'ere, but just along by the steps to the cliff."

"Ah. Then I reckon the first thing is to ring up the Station. Being Sunday——"

"Lucky to find you so prompt," the chair-man broke in, to be quelled by an indignant glance.

"Certainly not. What I mean is as how the Super may or may not be at the Station."

"Any'ow no 'arm in ringin' up and askin'," the ticket-seller suggested briskly.

"Course not," the constable agreed, but still seemed to hesitate.

"Well, come on. Git on with it," the other spoke impatiently.

"I'll have to ask you to do it," was the reluctant answer. "I must stay 'ere with the deceased."

"The 'oo?" asked the chair-man, "Oh, 'im—yus. Well, I'll 'op along and telephone for 'elp, eh?"

"Not *you*," the policeman answered firmly, re-setting his helmet on his head and recovering his air of prompt efficiency. "You're a witness, my lad."

The ticket-seller laughed.

"Don't say you're afraid ole George'll 'op it if you lets him loose," he said. "Any'ow if that's the big idea, I'll get along and ring up for you. Oo'll I ask for, and what'll I say?"

He was sternly rehearsed in the message which he was to give, and departed, full of importance. The policeman stood by the door and firmly closed it behind the messenger, in the disappointed faces of the crowd on the esplanade outside. The ticket-seller could be heard making his way, partly by vigorous pushing and partly by good-humoured if hardly Sabbatical chaff, through the serried ranks.

"*Now* then," the policeman sternly addressed the rather diminutive chair-man, "let's 'ear all about it," and he produced the inevitable pocket-book and pencil, and licked the point of the latter.

"Ask me another," was the prompt reply, at which the representative of the law gave a snort of suspicion and disbelief.

"Name *and* address"—he tried the effect of detail.

"George Nelson, 74 Rosemary Terrace," was carefully inscribed in the book, and then by slow stages a

description of the steps which had led the said George Nelson to the shocking discovery.

"Ah, so you mean to say you know nothing at all about it, then. Just went to see about 'im and 'is chair."

"That's ri'."

"H'm." A note was made with much lip-pursing. Poor George looked a trifle uneasy.

"But look 'ere——" he began.

"*Awl* right," he was interrupted. "The Super'll go into all that in good time. And now—who else knows about the business?"

"'Bout 'arf the population of Ingland," suggested George, "and the other 'arf's on its way to join us outside, if I am a judge of Prince's Beach, which I oughter be."

"That'll do. Not the time nor the place for jokes." And the constable glanced at the body on the deck-chair. "I mean, of course, who was with the deceased?"

"Young feller and a couple of girls, just a-bathing. Shall I fetch 'em?"

"No, you won't."

At this moment there was a loud banging on the door.

"What's that?" demanded the man in authority.

"Me. George."

"It's George Upwood, what was 'ere just now. Sells the bathing-tickets."

The constable looked relieved and opened the door, rather gingerly. There was an immediate attempt by each and every member of the crowd to get a view, and the constable had to exercise a good deal of vigour of

arm and lung to maintain his stronghold intact. The two Georges made some feeble show of assisting him.

Finally, he not only held his ground, but secured a measure of silence, in which he demanded in stentorian tones the " parties " who had found the body.

This request provoked a fresh difficulty, since a good dozen of those outside were at once curious and quick-witted enough to claim this honour. Finally George the Less had to be summoned to help with the work of identification. When finally the door had been shut again, the party inside had been swollen by three—the young man who had offered so playfully to waken the sleeping beauty in the deck-chair, and two others who had assisted in the carrying of the body up the beach.

The laborious process of taking down names and addresses had barely been completed when there was a further commotion outside, and a voice with the unmistakable accent of authority was heard demanding " Make way there." The constable, his relief unbounded, hastened to open the door and to admit no less a person than Superintendent Hawkins, accompanied by two constables and an obvious doctor.

" Well, Roberts ? " he demanded of the constable, but hardly allowed him to tell the preface of his story before he cut him short, half impatiently and half as if he was thinking of something else. " Have a look at the body, will you, doctor ? " ; he turned to the civilian whom he had brought with him, and stood looking down at the gruesome figure on the deck-chair whilst the doctor knelt and made a rapid examination.

" Dead, right enough. Can't say how long. Hour or so, perhaps more."

" Cause of death ? "

"Been stabbed. Clean wound. Pierced the heart, I should say. Can't speak positively yet, of course."

"No, doctor, I quite understand."

He stood in deep thought, a tall well-built figure. He tugged his smart, military grey moustache ; he screwed up his shrewd grey eyes, and a network of little wrinkles creased his sunburnt forehead. The doctor rose to the feet and waited.

"We'll get all the facts down in due course," the Superintendent decided. "I shall have to get you gentlemen to come along with me, I expect. Let's see—you've got their names and addresses ? "

"Yes, sir," P.C. Roberts reported smartly.

"Is this it ? The body was found in a deck-chair, on the beach."

"In the sea," George the Less ventured to interpose.

The Superintendent raised a questioning eyebrow and glanced at Roberts.

"George Nelson, sir. Chair Attendant. Found the body."

The Superintendent listened patiently while George told his story. As soon as he mentioned the young man in the bathing-dress, he was silenced by a gesture, and another glance of the shrewd eyes at the constable.

"Mr. Geoffrey 'Arding." Roberts had something of the manner of a butler announcing guests at a political reception.

"That's me," said the young man in the bathing-dress. "*And* a nasty turn it gave me, I can tell you."

In turn he recounted his share in the discovery.

"Never seen the—er—deceased before ? " the Superintendent enquired sharply.

"Never set eyes on him in my life, so far as I know."

" I see. Thank you. I gather you were about to bathe with a party of friends. Yes. Well, I'd better see them too. Are you staying here to-night, or do you live here ? "

Mr. Geoffrey Harding was, it seemed, staying at that select establishment, indistinguishable from a dozen of others on either side of it, which added distinction to the Marine Terrace, and went by the name of the " Glenelg Private Hotel." His London address was also noted.

" And these gentlemen ? " the Superintendent indicated the amateur stretcher-bearers, who hastily disclaimed any knowledge whatever, alike of the dead man, Mr. Harding, and the whole business. They also were staying in the town, each at a Select Private Hotel.

" Well, I don't think we need keep you," the Superintendent decided. " Of course you'll understand that I may want another talk with you. If so, I'll let you know, sir—yes, Mr. Harding. I don't know whether you want to resume your bathe—it's certainly hot enough in here."

Mr. Harding also seemed to find that the scene had lost its charm. Perhaps, too, he reflected that he would be a centre of attraction when he rejoined the world outside.

The three of them departed.

" You had better stand by a bit longer," the Superintendent came next to the two Georges. Then to the doctor : " I think we'd better get an ambulance. No need to keep the body here. Thompson " (this to one of the constables), " go and telephone ; then wait by the steps and bring the party along here when they come."

When the man had gone, the Superintendent resumed his remarks to the doctor, as if justifying his decision.

"The body's been moved already, you see. Couldn't be helped—the tide was coming in. The sea won't have left any traces, and as for footprints—well, there's about a thousand to the square foot at this time of year on the sands. Best thing we can do is to ascertain the cause of death for certain, and have photographs made. Perhaps you'll be good enough to go up to the Station with the ambulance and pass on the word, doctor."

The other assented willingly enough. There was another short silence.

"Main thing at this stage is identification," the Superintendent went on, as if speaking his thoughts aloud.

"I expect 'is friends is outside," George the Greater boldly suggested.

The Superintendent smiled, a little grimly.

"No doubt," he observed, "but it looks as if his friends had treated him a bit roughly, doesn't it! I doubt if they'll be over-anxious to come forward."

He smiled again, at the stupefying effect of this on his audience.

"Now you"—he addressed George the Greater—"you look after the bathing, don't you? Good. Then perhaps *you've* seen him before?"

But George vehemently denied this. When pressed, he admitted that he saw so many people through the little grille in his ticket-office that he couldn't pretend to recognise them all afterwards. Anyhow, he certainly didn't remember having seen the dead man before.

" And his bathing-dress. Come here."

George approached the corpse with manifest reluctance and shook his head.

" Not hired from you ? "

" No, sir. Not 'ired at all. All ours have initials on. Yellow. And the costumes dark blue." George the Less indicated his support of this statement.

" Quite right," said the Superintendent, drily. " I've been here fourteen years, and I've noticed it myself."

Gloomily he reflected to himself that the bathing-dress, with its red and white upper and black lower part, was of the standardised pattern now so frequently seen at every sea-side resort in the United Kingdom. He turned again to the chair-man, enquiring why precisely he had gone—or tried to go—to the dead man's side.

" Cos 'is chair was in the sea. We don't 'ire 'em out as pleasure boats," George the Less retorted pertly.

" And d'you generally let your customers play at being King Canute before you ask for their money ? " the Superintendent demanded.

" Don't know 'im," George the Less replied, and when the Superintendent repeated his question in a simpler form, explained that he went to the chair because it was in the sea, not because the occupant had not paid.

" Oh, then he *had* paid already ? "

" Yus."

" Then you *had* seen him before you found him—dead."

" Well, yus, in a manner of speaking I suppose I 'ad. But it's like this 'ere, sir, I don't see the people as is in the chairs, so much as the chair itself, if you follow me."

The Superintendent did not follow him, but finally he grasped the man's meaning. He relied not so much on his recognition of individual human beings as upon the location of the chairs. He had acquired a habit of remembering how the chairs were grouped and of knowing which of them he had visited for tickets and twopences.

"Course, there's lots as don't pay," he admitted, "some becos they swears thick and thin they 'as popped the tickets in their trouser pockets and left 'em up in the changing-rooms, and others becos they dodge me. Learnt it in London, I reckon."

He was brought back to this particular case, and then disclosed the fact that somewhere about one o'clock he had actually noticed that chair, all by itself —or rather the two chairs—and had made a note to keep an eye on them because they were so far out. He was quite certain he had been paid for them, but even when the dead man was there before his eyes he was not prepared to swear that he was the man who had paid, nor could he remember who the two people were in the chairs.

"Most likely a man and a girl," he suggested, with vague cynicism, and, as his reason, observed that the chairs were "on their own."

The Superintendent nodded. As a general conclusion based upon Sunday at Prince's Bay the argument was sound, though whether the general argument applied to a particular case was, of course, another matter.

"What about the other chair?" the Superintendent enquired. It appeared that this had been rescued and dragged ashore.

"I shall want to see it," he observed.

" So'll the boss," said George, " *and* that there chair too, I shouldn't wonder."

His grievance was ignored. Instead he was pressed to say whether he thought that the chair was at the same spot afterwards as it had been before, and after some thought he gave it as his own opinion that it was.

That seemed to be all that he or George the Greater had to recount. The one was told that he would be despatched in search of the other chair, and required to bring it straight back to the extemporised Police Station. The other was ordered to return to his ticket-box and on no account to leave until told he might do so by the Superintendent.

" Roberts, you stay here with the doctor till the ambulance comes. When the body's been removed, lock the door and wait outside. When that fellow brings the other chair, lock it up in here. You, Ellison (he addressed the other constable), " had better come with me."

He nodded a farewell to the doctor and briefly thanked him.

" See you later," he promised. " Oh, Roberts," he added, his hand on the door-knob, " I expect Sergeant Brewin along very soon. He'd better stay with you. Take him to have a look at the second chair."

He opened the door, Police Constable Ellison in his wake, and the two Georges close behind.

" Now then, make way there," he said sternly to the crowd. " If any one here knows the dead man, I'd be glad to see him—or her. The attendant here "—he indicated George the Greater—" will let them wait in the office."

There was a murmur, which the Superintendent apparently recognised as the prelude to misplaced humour.

"*But*," he added, "anyone wasting the time of the Police or trying to be funny, will be *for* it, see?"

The crowd parted readily enough to give him passage.

CHAPTER III

STILL NO NAME

The crowd had thinned considerably ; the incoming tide presented strong counter-attractions and it had become clear that the police had no idea of providing a popular entertainment.

The Superintendent turned towards the entrance to the " Gents' Bathing "—that is, that part of the establishment which was given up to boxes in which men could change. A voice behind him made him pause, and he turned to find Sergeant Brewin in plain clothes and rather breathless.

" Just got here, Super," he observed somewhat fatuously. " Came straight along when I got the message from the Station."

" Good, Sergeant. I wanted you in plain clothes. Now let me see——" And he drew him into the entrance to the changing-room, and spoke to him quietly.

" I think the best thing you can do is to hang round a bit and see if anyone talks of having seen the dead man down on the sands. Just have a look at the body—Roberts is on duty at the door of the room where it is."

" Right, sir."

" Mind you, don't be too conspicuous. If they see you going in they'll know you're Police and they won't talk so much."

" Yes, sir. Perhaps I'll see if I can pick up anything without having seen the body first."

" Very well."

And Sergeant Brewin slipped back into the crowd, now breaking up into semi-isolated knots. In his rather battered felt hat, grey " sports coat " and capacious flannel trousers, he blended easily enough with his environment.

The Superintendent and the escorting constable went their way. Their entry into the changing-room produced a slight sensation. The two attendants hurried forward.

" Heard the news, I suppose ? " he asked them, and having no doubt of their reply, went on at once to explain that as the dead man had been found in a bathing-dress it stood to reason he had changed. The Police therefore wanted his clothes for purposes of identification.

The attendants looked puzzled, and one of them scratched his head vigorously.

" Not 'aving set eyes on 'im since he got bumped orf," he remarked, sagely enough, " I can't say whether 'e changed 'ere or not."

" Quite so," the Superintendent answered with a smile. " But apparently he was in his bathing-dress before lunch, or else he changed about lunch-time. Won't that help ? I mean, either his clothes were left here all lunch-time, or else he came in during the slack time. I suppose you're pretty slack between one and two ? "

" That's right. But Bill 'ere was on duty to-day. What about it, Bill ? "

Bill shrugged his shoulders.

" Not 'ere," he said, with confidence. " Dead slack after about a quarter-past one, we was to-day. No one come in—not before you got back, 'Arry, about quarter-past two. *And* no one left 'is clothes 'ere neither. I know that, 'cos I cleaned up the 'ole place, see ? "

The Superintendent swore under his breath. For some reason which he would have found it hard to explain he had felt confident that the man had used the ordinary changing-place, and the one opposite the spot where he had set his deck-chair.

" Well, I suppose then he must have undressed at one of the other places, farther back "—for this was the farthest from the celebrated Bathing Pool, the heart of Prince's Bay and Beach.

" P'raps," said the attendant, " or else 'e 'ad a tent or a 'ut."

The Superintendent nodded, and reflected for a moment.

" Big job, that," he said, " and I'm short-handed on Sunday. Tell you what—one of you two can help me, can't you ? "

" Well, I s'pose——"

" Oh, I'll make it all right with the boss. What I want you to do is to run along to the other general bathing-places and ask the same question as I've just asked you. And if you can find an unclaimed set of clothes, just come back here and tell me—or the man on duty outside."

" Right you are," said Bill, and departed.

The Superintendent turned to the constable.

" That leaves an awkward sort of job for you, Ellison. You must do what you can to discover whether he changed in a hut—no, damn it, that's hopeless."

For as he spoke he realised that if the dead man had used a hut, then certainly he had not been its only user. The " huts " were almost bungalows in miniature, and it was in the highest degree improbable that one of them had a solitary occupant on such a Sunday afternoon. Either therefore he had shared it with friends, who had not yet realised the sinister cause for his prolonged absence, and would come forward as soon as they did ; or else the people who had shared it with him had had a hand in his death, in which case they were unlikely to give away information to a uniformed constable.

" No, you can't possibly tackle that," he resumed, " but you might try the tents. There's just a chance that he had a tent to himself. They're let out by the week, aren't they ? " he concluded, addressing the attendant.

" Yus. And of course there's a list of names in the office next door."

" Well, we don't know whether we'll need that yet. I suppose there's a similar list of the huts, eh ? Good. And if I'm not mistaken the huts run into hundreds but there's only a couple of dozen tents, tucked away at the back ? "

The attendant confirmed this view.

" There you are then, Ellison. Do your best. What I'm after is to find out if there's a tent which no one claims to occupy and which has a set of clothes and so on in it. See ? "

" Yes, sir," said the constable, and then hesitated.

" Well ? "

" Well, sir, it's bit awkward like. What I mean is, you can't go knockin' on the door of a tent, like. And if I walk straight in——"

He was dismissed with an impatient gesture and an exhortation to use his wits.

The Superintendent then returned to his extemporised headquarters just in time to see the body removed on a stretcher. He told P.C. Roberts to stand by, as a kind of orderly, whilst a third constable he despatched to assist Ellison in his researches. Sergeant Brewin he noticed was in animated talk with a group of visitors in the open-air café a few yards away.

He re-entered the room from which the body had just been removed ; there he found George the Less gloomily gazing at the blood-stained deck-chair and another, soaked with sea-water, which he had placed beside it. He looked up as the officer entered, shook his head and made a clucking noise to indicate his distress and disgust.

" Rescued it, have you ? Good," said the Superintendent.

" Wot abart me getting back on the job now ? " suggested the diminutive chair-man. " Gawd knows 'ow much revenue's a-goin' west, with me 'ung up 'ere all day. Not to speak of more chairs bein' washed away."

" Won't keep you much longer. Very sorry to have had to keep you so long. There's just this—you still don't remember seeing the dead man when you gave him his ticket for his chair ? "

He shook his head again. The Superintendent had a bright idea.

" Suppose he was in a bathing-dress when you asked him for the money ? What happens then ? I mean when they admit they haven't paid already ? "

" 'Ow d'yer mean ? Oh, I see. Well, it don't 'appen

so very often. I mean I mostly catches 'em before they takes their clothes orf."

" Just so. And this man ? Did you catch him as soon as that ? "

George the Less assumed a far-away look intended to convey intense thought which considerably irritated his interlocutor, and made no reply.

" Come," said the other sharply, " you told me that you knew you'd been paid for the chair because you knew you'd been to the place where the chair was. That's so, isn't it ? "

" That's ri'."

" Well, it stands to reason, if that's so, that you can't have been there very early because the chair was pretty nearly at low-tide point, wasn't it ? So it couldn't have been there much before low tide. Say about midday. And if the chair—or chairs—was still occupied at one o'clock or so, it's probable, I suppose, that the man was in his bathing-dress at twelve o'clock ? "

The chair-man apparently grasped what the Superintendent was driving at, and his calculated look of thought was suddenly replaced by a genuine flash of recollection.

" I've got yer," he exclaimed in triumph. " Comes back to me now, as yer might say. 'E *was* in 'is bathing-kit when I ask 'im for 'is money. And 'e said somethink abart it. Tryin' to be funny. They usually are."

" Well ? Go on."

" Awri', awri'. Well, there was a girl with 'im. And she 'opped up and said she'd go and get a couple of bob, 'cos she wanted some buns too. So she 'opped it, and I 'ung abart like, 'aving a look round at other chairs, 'cos they don't like it if yer 'angs abart too close,

as if yer don't feel too almighty sure they means to pay after all, and she come back with a paper bag and a tanner for the chairs. And I runs orf. Funny, 'ow vivid it comes back to me," he concluded with the sentiment if not the words of a film caption.

The Superintendent made rapid notes, and tactfully forbore to reproach the chair-man for his failure to recall these details sooner.

"Now this girl?" he asked.

But apparently George's recollection was not so vivid as all that—or else his idea of the meaning of the word was shaky. Beyond a conviction that she was wearing a bathing-dress of a dark colour—"but p'raps it was just wet," he added—and he *thought* a bathing-cap, he could supply no details at all.

Under pressure, however, he produced a further impression—it could not be called more than that—that the girl had not gone straight towards the esplanade at its nearest point but rather towards the Bathing Pool end. This at all events seemed to corroborate the theory that the dead man had changed, whether in hut, tent, or bathing establishment, nearer to the Bathing Pool than the place where his body had been laid.

Satisfied that he could, at least for the moment, extract no further details from the chair-man, the Superintendent finally released him and turned his own attention to the two chairs.

Their story was brief and simple. One was soaked with sea-water, but bore no traces of blood. The other was soaked both with blood and with water. And that was all he could read in them. Not a trace even of a finger-print.

"Not much *there*," he said to himself, "but we'd

better take them up to the Station as exhibits, I suppose." And he instructed the patient Roberts to get hold of a bit of cord and tie the two chairs up ready for transport in due course.

He joined George the Greater in his ticket-office, and talked politely if non-committally to him and the talkative old lady who apparently assisted him there. He could keep an eye from time to time on Sergeant Brewin, who seemed to be a " mixer " by nature, as well as a man possessed of a large capacity to consume iced drinks.

Presently the bathing-attendant re-appeared, and was summoned to " headquarters " to make his report.

It was not helpful.

" All of 'em says the same as us," he said. " No clothes left over lunch-time, and no one come in to change then. It's a reg'lar 'abit to clean up, like, round about one o'clock when the casuals—them as just looks in for a dip, and don't 'ave a bathing 'ut—'ave cleared off for a bit of food."

He was warmly thanked for his help, and returned to his duties. Since it is strictly forbidden at Prince's Bay to bathe " from a macintosh," or in other words, since it is compulsory to use and pay for the facilities provided by a thoughtful Municipality, it seemed to follow that if the dead man indeed had changed into a bathing-dress before one o'clock he must have used a tent or a hut.

Well, the two constables might be able to get news about the tents. Failing that, it looked as if it would be necessary to wait till nearly sunset for identification. By that time, the occupants of the huts would have packed up and gone homewards, and it would

be known whether one set of them were agitated by the prolonged absence of one of their number.

Slow work, and difficult with only a few helpers. All very fine when one had thousands of detectives and God knows what to help one, thought the Superintendent. But he comforted himself with the reflection that the problem of identity might be a minor one. But how on earth was he, with the resources available to him, to institute enquiries among the thousands of people on the sands now, or who had been there that morning, as to whether they'd seen anything connected with the murder?

The only certain thing seemed to be that it was murder.

He pondered uneasily, and wished he could soon get back to the Station to attend to the administrative side of the affair. The broadcasting of an S.O.S. now . . .

The two constables when they returned brought a very negative report. They had been to every tent. In every case but four, they had found the occupants, whether near by or inside, and in no case had any of them admitted to having lost one of their party or to having a spare set of men's clothing. The other four tents were empty and showed no signs of occupation that day, and certainly contained no clothes.

The Superintendent swore.

"Must have used a hut then," he decided. In that case, he supposed he had better get back to the Station.

He dispersed his forces, sending Roberts back to his long-deserted beat, but telling him on the way to send a taxi to the top of the steps up the cliff; he stationed Ellison at "headquarters," and told the third constable to take up a similar position at the Bathing Pool

end of the esplanade. Forlorn measures, unless someone was going suddenly to discover the loss of a friend.

He managed to catch Sergeant Brewin's eye and discreetly beckoned to him. Under pretence of exchanging a few casual words, he asked how he was getting on.

"Got a hint or two," said the Sergeant.

"Good. Can you get their names and addresses without frightening them?"

"Done it."

"Good. Then stick to it. I'm off to the Station. Report there when you've got enough for me to work on. I'll try to send a plain-clothes man or two along to give you a hand."

Pocketing his dignity, the Superintendent picked up the two deck-chairs and clambered with them up the steps to the waiting taxi.

CHAPTER IV

VOCES POPULI

Sergeant Brewin in his off-duty dress found a pleasant readiness in the bystanders to talk to an affable stranger. At first he moved amongst them, passing one group after another, in order if possible to get a line to their particular point of view.

"Didn't you hear? Why Gladys was there when they found the body. They were just going to bathe."

"Wasn't it horrible? 'Wake up, sir!' he said. You know, joking. And then he saw that he was stone dead."

"Throat cut from ear to ear."

"Oh, don't. Too awful."

"Just think—it might have been someone we knew. How he got there—right in the sea, I mean—I can't think."

The Sergeant came to the conclusion from the scrap of talk between two elderly ladies and a gloomy, desiccated gentleman in a gloomier panama hat that though they knew at first hand the young folk who had made the discovery, they had not known or seen the dead man.

"A Russian, that's what they say."

"Nasty murderin' brutes."

"'Ere, steady. Anyway, there's no blooming class distinctions in Russia."

" Don't see why they need to go and paint the sea red 'ere."

" Sounds as if he was a Israelite to me. You and your Red Sea, Alf."

Not promising ; nor yet the oft-repeated enquiry which he heard in other groups, " Think it'll be in the paper ? "

" Pity it didn't 'appen yesterdye," was one bright comment. " The Sunday pypers know 'ow to write them things so much the best."

Then he found something which sounded more helpful. Half-a-dozen young men, with two young ladies, all showing signs of their determination to burn as much skin as possible, were seated and standing round a table in the café.

" Did you recognise him, Sally ? "

" Well, yes and no, if you know what I mean."

A plump blonde nodded sagely, and Brewin admired her intelligence less than her appearance ; it seemed to him a singularly unconvincing reply.

He contrived to jostle one of the men, with artistic inadvertence, and apologised profusely.

" Such a crowd here," he said. " Like sardines, eh ? "

The youth grinned good-humouredly.

" What's all the excitement ? " the Sergeant went on, innocently, " Making a talkie, or something ? "

" What ! You haven't heard ? "

" No. Just started down. For Gawd's sake, don't tell me someone's gone and swum the North Sea."

" I say, Henry, here's a feller wants to know what's up."

" That's rich. Thought the whole population knew by now."

" 'Aven't you reelly heard ? " asked Sally, losing a stratum of refinement in her interest.

" Sorry," said Brewin, " I must be a kind of Rip Van Winkle."

" Wasn't that a sweet panto. ? " the blonde enquired, and Brewin was confirmed in his estimate of her intelligence.

" Silly ! " giggled Sally.

" Good old Daisy," cried another young man in the party.

" Well, what is it ? " asked Brewin, while the blonde wondered whether to be pleased or angry.

The young man whom he had jostled jerked his head towards the sea and remarked airily.

" Found a gory corpse, down in the ocean wave—that's all."

" Coo ! " said Brewin, " you don't say ! "

" Fact," Henry said.

" Who was it ? "

" Dunno. Such a blasted crowd I couldn't see. Brought him up on a stretcher."

" Deck-chair it was."

" All right, old know-all."

" If you'd had sense enough to get on a table same as I did——"

" Now boys, don't argue," put in the blonde. " It gives me a headache, what with the sun and all."

The Sergeant made a determined effort to switch the talk back to the point which interested him.

" Nasty shock for the feller's friends. It was a man, you said ? "

" Yes, and what's more, Sal—Miss Peacock, here, thinks she's seen him about."

" Not really ? "

" Yes, that's so, isn't it, Sally ? "

" Well, of course, I couldn't see 'im very well—when they brought 'im up, you know. Still, as I was on the sands when they found 'im and went down to see what was up, and pushed my way——"

" Thank God for the General Omnibus," said Henry.

" Shut up. Aren't you funny ? "

" I must say it's cruel hot," observed the blonde, and rolled a large and longing eye at a tray of iced drinks which had just been brought to a neighbouring table.

" Thirsty work, talkin', too," Brewin put in quickly. " And as I'm the listener, I think the drinks are on me." And by some miracle of telepathy he attracted the perspiring waiter's attention, and ordered drinks for the company.

" Now then, Miss Peacock," he said boldly, " Parker's my name, you'll be saying. Do let's hear whether you knew the poor man."

" Well, it's hard to say. I mean, I didn't *know* him, you know, but I think I've seen him."

" Down here d'you mean ? "

" Yes, and no longer ago than this morning. I'm pretty sure I saw him. In fact," she giggled, " I butted 'im in the tummy."

" 'Evins ! " cried one of the youths. " Don't say you 'ad a knife between your teeth, Sal."

By way of reply she emptied about half a pint of sticky drink over his bare shoulders and the conversation again went astray. When calm was restored, the patient Sergeant tried again.

"I say, don't you think you ought to tell the Police?"

"What, me? Why? They don't want to know that the feller got in me way when I was practisin' my swimmin' you know. If you want to be smart you have to put your face into the sea and kick."

Brewin laughed.

"So that was how you met him!"

"Just like Sal," Henry interposed. Sally was something of a centre of attraction—she certainly outshone the bovine blonde.

"Picks 'em up in the funniest places," was another comment.

"Thanks," she answered, a shade stiffly. "But not this time. For one thing, though I daresay he was worth two of any of you boys, he'd got a lady friend with him."

"Really!" said Brewin. "Poor thing. How awful for her—I mean when this happened."

"I daresay she's none the worse off," Sally suggested. "Struck me, she was one better than he was. You know, looked as if she didn't really care for Prince's Bay—and though me eyes were full of salt water, I could see in his eye that—well, you know."

Henry guffawed, and the golden Daisy shook slightly, apparently having really understood something at last.

A slight disappointment was now in store for the Sergeant, who was getting quite elated by the success of his efforts. For Miss Sally Peacock was quite unable to describe the dead man's companion; she could describe her costume and cap—dark green and closely fitting—but that was all. Nor, apparently, had the bathing-dress been particularly noticeable, except

that it was of a superior kind to the standardised ones mostly to be met with at Prince's Bay.

Still, she had a pretty clear idea that it was something like half-past eleven when she bumped into the man—she shivered artistically at the thought. And he and the girl with him were then making their way to dry land, she was positive.

These scanty details took some time to extract, as well as another round of drinks. However, in the process he managed to learn where the party were staying—yet another Select Private Hotel. Then the Sergeant murmured something about " time *he* took a dip in the briny too," and amidst cordial farewells strolled indolently away, still alert for hints in the scraps of talk which he overheard as he went.

Farther along the esplanade, as he leant on the iron railings, he hit on another promising trail.

" Vy, my tear," a very stout and Semitic gentleman was saying to his wife—who matched him admirably—" you surely see it would be no goot for the piziness for me to go to the Police. Our customers—vell, some of them are pretty sure to be here and we must consider appearances, hein ? "

" Yes, yes, Jacop. But this is different——"

" Jost as you like, my tear, put—mind you, if the Rosens see me valkin' or talkin' mit a policeman, they'll be sure to say it vos not of my own free will."

The Sergeant decided to take a chance.

" Excuse me, sir," he said, " I think I can help you."

He almost laughed aloud at the expression of alarm and wrath which swept over the couple's faces.

" I'm a policeman myself," he went on quickly.

" Show you my card, if you like. Sorry to butt in, but hearing what you were saying to the lady——"

" My vife, sir."

" Sorry. The point is that you can safely talk to me—it's a day off, as you might say, and no one would guess I was in the Force."

The old lady cackled gleefully.

" Vot is it ? " demanded her lord and master impatiently.

" Never saw a copper in sand-shoes till now," she said.

" Cha ! Don't notice her, Mr. Policeman. Jost now it was she wanted me to go to the Station. All pecause ve vos sitting quite close to the pore gentleman vot vos killed."

As soon as he was certain that there was no risk of his social reputation suffering, he was most ready to tell his story. It did not amount to a great deal, but the Sergeant was glad of anything which might bear on the case. The couple had been sitting in deck-chairs and they had noticed another couple come out of the sea and stand talking for a minute or two and then the man walked towards and past them, while the girl sat on the sand at the edge of the sea.

A minute or two later the man returned, bringing a couple of deck-chairs with him. Just as he passed them on his return journey, the girl turned and waved to him, and the man dropped one chair and swore.

" Pinched his thumb," explained Jacob.

They had a very good view of his face at this juncture, for his performance with the chair was, it seemed, a " scream," as funny as Harry Tate. And eventually the girl ran laughing to his assistance.

"Thauthy huthy," put in the old lady and momentarily defeated the Sergeant.

The pair went off, the narrator continued, right away by the rocks. Quite away from everyone. Put the chairs down very close together and—the story finished with an expressive shrug of his fat shoulders, and the tilt of his hat over his hooked nose.

Sergeant Brewin tried hard to wring some more information from them, but in vain. Apparently the two old people had shortly afterwards moved away; quite soon afterwards, they asserted. The Sergeant thought he detected something peculiar in the way they insisted on this, and was curious enough to press the point. Eventually he elicited the fact—not as a reason of course, but as an incidental truth—that the chair-man was seen to be approaching. The Sergeant, of course, did not know that this afforded a fairly direct link between their story and the chair-man's, but stored it away in his memory for future use.

Jacob said that he was not sure whether the couple were or were not within earshot. Such a lot of noise on the beach, he pointed out, that they certainly could not be heard that morning from where he was sitting. And perhaps, he said with a leer, they were not talking very loud.

"Not quarrelling, eh?" Brewin queried.

"I should say not," was the reply, quickly followed by an admission that he did not really know. They seemed on very good terms when the chairs were being fetched, but of course they might have had a tiff later on. Not only was it unlikely that he would have heard; he couldn't even have seen, since the chairs in themselves formed a complete screen. Besides, as he had

said, he hadn't stayed much longer, but had accompanied his wife to another part of the shore. Yes, the sands were crowded, though there were not very many bathers—the tide was so low. And, of course, few if any of the bathers were close to the rocks and therefore to the dead man and his companion. The few that were in the sea, were well towards the centre of the sandy patch.

The old man readily gave the Sergeant his name and his address both at Prince's Bay and in London, whither he and his wife were returning in the course of the week. And the Sergeant, having thanked them and promised to treat their story with the discretion proper to their social importance, strolled away again. At this point, he noticed that the Superintendent was cautiously beckoning him ; he briefly reported progress and slipped away again to resume his enquiries.

CHAPTER V

LONDON TAKES A HAND

By nine o'clock that Sunday night the only progress recorded was of the administrative kind.

The Superintendent's instinct that the dead man's identity was the first difficulty to be surmounted, seemed to be justified. On the one hand Sergeant Brewin had only found three persons who were fairly certain that they had seen the dead man, and all his efforts, reinforced by two more plain-clothes detectives, had failed to produce further news. On the other hand, no one had come forward either from amongst the occupants of bathing huts or from elsewhere, to notify the police of the disappearance of one of their friends or household.

A large number of photographs of the dead man—made as lifelike as was possible in the circumstances—had been printed and circulated, to the local Press and the Police. In addition, it had been arranged that a message should be broadcast from the local wireless station, giving a description of the man and asking whether anyone could help to identify him. Thirdly, a detective had been sent to the main hotels, on the off-chance, if not in the forlorn hope, that a clue might be picked up at one of them ; to have tried to extend this to an enquiry at all the hotels and boarding-houses would have meant, in Prince's Bay, something perilously like a

house-to-house visit, and was too big a job to tackle unless it proved later to be an essential measure.

Finally, the Superintendent had had a lengthy telephone conversation with Major Dillon, the Chief Constable. The latter had just come in from an exhausting but triumphant day's golf, when the telephone rang, and consequently his frame of mind was at once amiable and indolent.

He whistled when the Superintendent briefly outlined the facts.

"Sure it's not suicide?" he said. "Oh, I know, you've made it clear that's impossible. Unless of course you find a doctor to say the man could have stabbed himself and then thrown the knife into the sea. Or theoretically it's possible, don't you agree, that someone else took the knife, and yet the fellow had stabbed himself. . . . Oh no, I don't press it. I've a natural inclination to suicide myself when I visit Prince's Bay and it's all the fashion nowadays to base detection on psychology."

The Superintendent's comment was vague.

"Well, Superintendent, and what d'you want?" the Major went on. "Seems to me you're doing finely. It's going to take time to get to the bottom of the business. It'd be very nice, of course, to pick up the murderer to-day, nearly red-handed, but I'm afraid we can't hope for that. Careful and steady, that's our motto. And I'll see you get all the extra help I possibly can."

"Thank you, sir. I'm glad you approve. As for what I want—well, it seems to me to be a case for Scotland Yard."

"H'm. You really feel that? Mind you, *I* don't

object, and if we're going to call them in, the sooner the better."

"I'm sure it's best, sir."

"You know I've every confidence in you, Superintendent."

"Thank you, sir. But it isn't that—— My point is that in all likelihood the roots of the affair, so to speak, lie right outside Prince's Bay. No, not in all likelihood ; that's overstating it. But it's just as likely as not. Think how small our resident population is, compared to the number of visitors."

"Mathemetically I'm sure you're right. And what's more I trust you far enough to think your idea is the right one. Go ahead. Call in your big-wigs. And remember I'll do what I can to see you get credit for doing it, if it turns out that it's the wise step."

The talk ended with renewed thanks from the Superintendent and promises to keep Major Dillon fully informed of all developments.

"And now for Scotland Yard," said the Superintendent to himself. He tapped a cigarette vigorously on his desk, then lit it and leant back in his revolving chair, and blew a cloud of smoke ceilingwards, and smiled. He had worked with Scotland Yard before, and appreciated that his appeal to it would not produce a brilliant sleuth, to solve the problem single-handed, but in sober fact would put a vast machine in motion. That was its strength and its weakness ; it could follow up simultaneously a hundred trails but it might not follow each of them with equal skill or by identical methods.

He had stretched out his hand to pick up the telephone and put through a trunk call to London when there was a tap on the door.

" What is it ? " he asked.

The door opened to admit Sergeant Brewin, looking rather less holiday like and jaunty than he had in the early afternoon. Still, he looked as if he had news.

" Well, Sergeant ? "

" Struck oil pretty quick sir, or so I believe. At the Grand."

" They identify the man ? "

" No, sir. Not for certain. It's just this—a man for whom they'd got a room reserved hasn't turned up."

" H'm. A bit vague. Someone they know ? "

" No, sir. Not exactly."

The Sergeant paused. His discovery began to seem less sensational than when first he made it.

" Oh, come on, Sergeant. Let's hear it all—if there's anything to hear."

" Yes, Super. It's like this. A couple of days ago—no, on Wednesday, a man rang up and booked a double room, just for Sunday night, he said."

" Ah, double room."

" Yes. Said he'd be motoring down this morning and probably would be in the Grand for lunch. But if it was a hot day, he'd go and bathe first thing after the drive down and bring the car and luggage along afterwards."

" H'm. May be someone quite different. What you mean by saying they ' don't exactly ' know him at the Grand ? "

" Well, apparently he said he'd stayed there before but not for some years—three, I think."

" Hadn't you got a photograph ? "

" Of course, Super. But the porters are new—you

remember the new management took over two years ago and made a good many changes. The reception clerks frankly admit they can't remember ten per cent. of the people who stay at the Grand. So I've left the photos with the manager, in case any of the older members of the staff—I mean the ones who've been there three years or more—recognise him."

"I should think it's a hundred to one chance."

"Yes, sir. Still, they looked up the register and a Mr. and Mrs. George Smith did stay at the Grand just under three years ago."

"Good God, Sergeant. What a distinctive name! I should think they've a hundred Smiths a year."

The Sergeant smiled.

"No, sir. People don't—well, adopt that kind of name. It's a bit *too* obvious."

"And you think there are very few real George Smiths in the world. I wish I had your simple faith, Sergeant."

The unfortunate Brewin looked rather sulky; nor did his gloom depart with his chief's next words.

"You're right, Sergeant. We mustn't ignore *any* possibility. So we'll get to work on this one. Let's assume that the dead man is your Mr. George Smith; perhaps the photographs will be recognised, perhaps they won't. It seems clear he didn't go to the hotel on arrival. Suppose we start looking for a car."

"How are we to identify it, sir?"

"Quite so. I'm afraid that, in spite of what you say, I don't build on finding that only one George Smith has a registered car. And we've no idea what it looks like. We've only got these facts. If George Smith is the dead man's name, and he carried out his programme—until

someone put a violent end to it—I suppose he and Mrs. Smith went straight down to bathe. What are you laughing at? "

" Sorry, sir. Very sorry. Just remembered that Smith was the man in the Brides in the Bath case."

" Good heavens, don't jump to conclusions like that. I imagined you had ambition. If that's how your mind works, you'd better chuck this job and become a lawyer, or something like that."

The Sergeant abased himself in expressions of regret.

" All right. But don't play the fool again. Let's get back to business. It's a matter of going to all the possible car-parks. The car'd have been dusty, I suppose. Ah, yes; where did the fellow ring up the Grand from? "

" They only know it was a trunk call. But three years ago he registered as ' of London.' "

" Sketchy again. Still, if he came down from London, it means he probably started early or else came fast. Sure to be covered in dust. And there must have been some luggage. And a lady. And the chances are he spoke to the man in charge of the park."

He paused.

" All of which," he went on, " may be utterly wrong. It's based on all sorts of wild hypotheses. But you've started a hare, and you'd better catch it—or I'll catch *you* instead."

Sergeant Brewin retired somewhat gloomily, feeling that his efforts were very ill-rewarded by the imposition of further work. Nice way to spend a Sunday afternoon in August, he muttered to himself—but not until he was outside Superintendent Hawkins's room and the door shut behind him.

The latter prepared again to demand his trunk call, but before doing so jotted down a series of notes, so that he might be sure to omit nothing. He bethought him that though, as he had promised, he had had a word or two with the doctor when he returned from the shore, he had not seen the statement which he had promised to dictate.

He sent for it and glanced quickly through it. It added nothing to what he already knew, but it seemed safe to assume that the wound was the cause of death. It seemed to have been caused by a round implement, like a butcher's steel but rather thicker. Apparently the weapon had been very sharp and rather short, yet to have been driven home with a good deal of force; for the flesh round the wound had been severely bruised. Death had been almost instantaneous, despite the considerable flow of blood; and it seemed likely that it took place about an hour before the discovery.

The Superintendent found it difficult to visualise the weapon which had been used; a short spike, fitted with a hilt like an epée, but smaller—that was the kind of thing, but he could not conceive why it should have been employed. It was certainly not a common object, nor was it suitable for carrying in the pocket or up the sleeve, for the peculiar hilt would have made it awkward and clumsy to conceal.

Perhaps the Scotland Yard people would have some ideas on the subject. It is not everyone who has a gift for visualising an entire object from a few particulars. Descriptions of people, now; would the description which had been circulated and broadcast really convey much to the common or garden listener? " Middle

aged, slightly bald, dark hair, rather full face, double chin, clean shaven, brown eyes, complexion sallow, height 5 ft. 10½ in., heavily built, inclined to corpulence "—when you came to think about it, there were probably thousands of people in London alone whom the description fitted. Thank goodness, the photographs had also been circulated. The Press no doubt would reproduce them if asked to do so, though that could hardly be before Monday evening. It was not likely that the morning papers would have more than a small paragraph announcing the discovery of a dead man on the sands at Prince's Bay.

His trunk call came through quickly. He asked to speak to Detective Inspector Huskisson, a smart young fellow whom he knew personally—the sort of man who suggested a promising barrister rather than a detective who had risen very rapidly from the ranks. Huskisson, however, was not on duty, so instead he abandoned himself to routine methods and found himself recounting his story to one of the Chief Inspectors.

His message was repeated aloud as he gave it, and taken down in shorthand by an attendant clerk at the other end.

"Right," said the Chief Inspector, at the end. "Thanks for letting us know so promptly. I'll send someone down to Prince's Bay at once. There isn't a great deal to work on yet, and it looks as if we ought to be able to pick up something more at your end. Meantime we'll get to work this end too. Send along those photographs at once, won't you? Right. Good-bye."

"Can't complain," the Chief Inspector observed to the clerk, when he had rung off. "Have to treat the

locals kindly and this fellow has let us in a good deal sooner than they usually do. Still, if he'd rung up a couple of hours sooner, we could really have got a move on. There'd have been just a chance of picking up the car on the return journey, assuming that Mrs. George Smith drove it back to town, and we could have got out an S.O.S. Sunday night's awkward."

He reflected.

" Now who shall I send down? I wonder who knows this Prince's Bay man? We don't want any personal antipathies. Let's see. Ah, yes, I fancy the Exchange said he'd asked for someone else by name."

He learnt that the Superintendent had asked for Inspector Huskisson.

" Get me his house," he ordered, " or flat, or whatever it is."

He waited rather impatiently; then the operator reported that the Inspector was out. He had, it seemed, a small service flat off Queen's Gate and the housekeeper reported that he had left ten minutes or so before. She understood that he would be back by eleven o'clock.

" Right," said the Chief Inspector, glancing at the clock, which showed that already it was just past ten. " That'll be time enough. Ring him again then if you can't get him before."

After all, there was really no point in sending him down to Prince's Bay that night. Such routine enquiries as could be made before the morning could be left to the local people.

A feature of the neighbourhood of Queen's Gate is the similarity of one street to another, and one house to another. Elder Place is no exception to the rule and

perhaps it is this similarity which increases the indifference of the inhabitants to their neighbours' identity and doings—a common enough characteristic in London. Dwellers in Elder Place were probably so accustomed to seeing a large but undistinguished two-seater outside No. 17 that they noticed it no more than they noticed the lamp-posts and the pillar-box at the corner. The emergence of a slender, rather elegant man who paused at the top of the steps from door to street, glanced to right and left, and then got quickly into the car and drove off towards Hyde Park attracted no attention even from the house opposite, where an elderly couple were standing at the top of the area steps conversing with a similar couple next door. The car had barely vanished round the corner when one of the old ladies suddenly " dratted the telephone."

" Rings every blessed hour of the day and night—I bet it's for that there Inspector Huskisson."

She stumped down the steps, and the remaining trio discussed that never-failing topic, the iniquities of the telephone system.

" Won me bet," announced the old lady, reappearing a few minutes later. " Inspector Huskisson, *as* usual. And they'll be ringing up again about eleving o'clock. So I hopes to goodness 'e will be back by then and not keep me sittin' up all night to answer the telephone for 'im."

As it turned out, her fears were groundless. The Inspector returned before a quarter to eleven, looking more than ever like a young man of means instead of a policeman, and suiting his environment as well as Sergeant Brewin suited Prince's Bay.

But Sergeant Brewin had this advantage over him ;

he had happened to be on the spot just when he was wanted. If Inspector Huskisson had not happened to decide to take half-an-hour's stroll after putting his car in the garage, he might have saved himself and others quite a lot of trouble.

CHAPTER VI

A NEIGHBOURLY INTEREST

Detective-Inspector Herbert Halliday Huskisson, who liked to think he was at least as sharp as an HHH pencil, received his instructions by telephone at eleven o'clock from a rather sleepy Chief Inspector and was told to start first thing next morning for Prince's Bay. He would receive by special messenger before he started a copy of the message from Superintendent Hawkins, and so would arrive knowing as much about the case as anyone at Scotland Yard. Yes, certainly, he might go down by car.

He was one of those unfortunates who are not strangers to early rising ; and it was with the housekeeper's full assent that he not infrequently infringed all the rules and regulations of his service flat by cooking his own breakfast. By the time Elder Place was beginning to rouse itself to the week's work he had got almost by heart the document which the messenger had thrust into the letter-box during the night, had mopped up an excellent omelette, collected his Chrysler from the garage and taken the road for Prince's Bay.

It was a superb morning, promising another baking hot day, and he thoroughly enjoyed the run. He was not looking forward very much to the end of it, for he rather fancied that Prince's Bay was the sort of place he had outgrown.

It was just over two hours before he drew up outside the Prince's Bay Police Station, only to learn that the Superintendent had been called out on business. He enquired about hotels and decided that the Grand would suit him the best, on personal as well as official grounds. He drove round there, secured a room and deposited his suit-case, left his car in the hotel garage, and started down towards the shore. It struck him that he would do well to get the " general atmosphere " of Prince's Bay before he embarked on the case. He looked down rather contemptuously from the top of the cliffs. However, it was no doubt too early for the sands to be crowded ; he had vaguely imagined that they were permanently black with humanity. On the contrary, they were hardly crowded at all and were in every respect immaculately clean and tidy. He made his way down to the esplanade and strolled along it and found that the appearance of the young people who were about the place was more attractive than he had expected, and that the sweet-stalls and fruit-stalls were of good class. Even the huge boards which displayed countless photographs and snapshots taken on the beach and the esplanade, on the cliffs and in the sea, seemed singularly free from vulgarity ; certainly the impression they conveyed was of holiday-makers who knew how to enjoy themselves inoffensively.

He heard a click, and turned to see that a photographer was already at work and had just caught two laughing girls. " Stand Number A3," the man said, " this afternoon," an assignation which apparently they understood. Anyway, thought HHH to himself, they aren't photographed merely because they hope

they'll appear in a "smart" picture paper later in the week, or any nonsense of that kind.

The more he watched the scene, the more his spirits rose. "Really, this is a jolly spot," he said to himself, and he turned quite reluctantly to climb up to the top of the cliffs again. His ascent was slow, for hordes of children and mothers and fathers were descending, and if the Jewish element was strong, or even preponderant, they set a good example to the Gentile in good humour and family affection. "Wish I were here for a holiday," HHH mused, "and not to clean up a murder."

It was about half-past ten when he got back to the Station, and there he found Superintendent Hawkins awaiting him somewhat impatiently, with Sergeant Brewin in attendance.

His tact was equal to the occasion. He began by a subtle hint that *he* had expected to find the Superintendent awaiting him ; that of course he did not want to see anyone or anything before the Superintendent himself, especially as he had had the pleasure of working with him before ; and that he thought he could not employ the time better than in getting an idea of the appearance and geography of Prince's Bay.

"Last time, you came to London. This time, I've come to you," he said with a smile.

The Superintendent was disarmed by his manner and a little impressed by the gentility of his appearance.

"Mountain's come to Mahomet this time, eh ?"

"If you like, Superintendent," he answered with a laugh. "At least, I've always assumed that Mahomet was the bigger of the two."

They talked on general topics for a few minutes—the weather, the Grand Hotel, the run down from

London—and then the Superintendent thought the time had come to get to business.

"You're *au fait* with all the circumstances, I suppose?" he asked. Huskisson explained the state of his knowledge.

"Good. Now first as to procedure. The Chief Constable's probably coming over at the end of the morning. We might perhaps all three lunch together. Then there's the doctor; he's to get on with the P.-M. this afternoon. And then there's the inquest—I thought to-morrow for that, and adjourn it if necessary."

"That seems capital. But I should say an adjournment is inevitable."

"I quite agree. Well, now for our efforts here. By the way, this is Sergeant Brewin. He's put in a lot of hard work on the case already."

The two men shook hands.

"Now let's all sit down comfortably," the Superintendent resumed, and when they had done so, "We've got a bit further on than we were when I rang up the Yard last night," he said.

"Ah."

"Yes. Brewin here has possibly got news of the car that the dead man came down in."

"Really. That's good work. If that could be found, it would clear the air."

"Don't know that it can be found," Brewin interposed, rather hastily. "It's just this. A biggish two-seater with a man and a girl in it did draw up at the parking-place—the one by the bandstand on the cliffs——"

"I know. Saw it just now."

"There's an ex-service man who's in charge,"

Brewin went on. " This car turned up, he thinks, just about twenty to eleven yesterday morning. He didn't notice the man particularly, but his general idea agrees pretty well with the dead man. Of course, he remembers that he had a dark grey flannel suit and a soft grey cap —he would : when we'd got nothing but a bathing-dress."

" Still, those details may help—*if* it's the right man."

" He remembers the girl better, I gather," put in the Superintendent.

" Yes, sir," Brewin continued. " Though he can't say much except that she was wearing a small red hat, close fitting, and a loose grey coat, with what he calls a furry collar. He says she was pretty, and slim, and apparently he'd been pleased with her ankles. But he can only say that he thinks she was fair—that her hat covered her hair. He's not sure about the colour of her eyes. Still, he *thinks* he could recognise her—though he admits she seemed to have used a lip-stick pretty freely."

" Not what I'd call a marvellous eye for female beauty," said HHH.

" No, sir. That's true enough, I'm afraid."

" Well. Why should these be our two people ? Did he identify the man from your photographs ? Has he seen the body ? "

" I showed him the photograph——"

" We can get him up here whenever you like, of course," the Superintendent interrupted. Huskisson nodded and smiled and took the opportunity, with his superior's permission, to light an expensive briar pipe.

" About the photograph," he queried between puffs.

" He wouldn't swear to it. Said it was very like."

"Then we'll have to get him along."

Sergeant Brewin rose to his feet, but Huskisson motioned to him to wait.

"Let's hear the rest first," he suggested.

"The rest?"

"Yes, yes," said the Superintendent rather impatiently. "The car—luggage. Only he noticed the girl more than the man."

"Oh yes, sir. Apparently the girl jumped out as soon as the car stopped, and ran up to him, smiling all over her face, and asked if they could leave the car there while they bathed. Then she called out to the driver that it was all right. She talked to this fellow—Carter's his name—while the car was being backed into position and so on. In fact, he gave her the ticket, he says."

"And then?" Huskisson asked, exchanging a significant glance with the Superintendent.

"Then, apparently, the man in the car opened the dickey. Evidently he'd got a towel and bathing-dress loose inside, for he pulled out a white bundle. But the girl insisted on getting out a suit-case—green leather, this fellow Carter says it was. The girl said something to the man about her bathing-dress being underneath and she wasn't going to unpack in the street. And he thinks she added something about being able to lock up his watch in it. Then they walked off together, arm in arm, towards the steps to the sands. And then all of a sudden the girl comes running back and asks Carter to be sure and look after the car; would he be there all the morning? Of course he said yes, and back she ran after the other fellow."

"I fancy that's when he noticed her ankles," observed Huskisson with a smile.

There was a brief silence.

"That's the lot, is it?" asked Huskisson.

"Yes, sir."

"Strikes me as significant," the Superintendent said. "Pretty clear that the girl made sure she could get the car. She took the ticket *and* contrived to have the custody of the man's pocket-book."

"Yes," said Huskisson, "but if that's so, it suggests that she certainly didn't premeditate murdering him —*if* she did, of course."

The other two looked at him questioningly.

"Why, obviously," he explained. "You don't suppose she'd have taken such pains to ensure that the man Carter would know her again if she'd intended to commit a murder an hour later?"

"Quite so. You're right, Huskisson," the Superintendent agreed. There was another pause.

"Well now, what about fetching Carter along?"

"Half a minute," was Huskisson's reply, as he rose to his feet and knocked out his pipe into the empty grate. "I gather the Sergeant's told you his story before, Superintendent."

"Yes, he has. Why?"

"Well, you forget that it's *all* news to me. What about the car now? Did Carter make a note of the number?"

"I'm very sorry," the Superintendent apologised. "The answer's Yes and No. That's to say, he didn't make a note of the number, and he can't remember it. But he knows it was a London number—U.K."

"And the car was thick in dust, sir," put in Brewin.

"Well, that's always something," said Huskisson. "We'd better see him; there's a chance that he noticed

a few more details which would help us to identify the car."

"It was a greyish-green, sir."

"And he doesn't know what make of car?"

The Superintendent smiled ruefully.

"You must forgive me, Inspector. Caught me out again. Yes, Brewin tells me he noticed that."

He paused and then resumed.

"I don't know that it helps much. You see lots of them about. A Chrysler."

Huskisson jumped. The Superintendent noticed it, and he laughed.

"Same as mine," he explained. "Sorry they're so common. And for that matter mine's got a U.K. number too."

The Superintendent laughed too.

"I think that really is the lot," he said. "Now, Sergeant, I think you'd better fetch Carter along. Take a plain-clothes constable with you to take his place for the time being."

When the Sergeant had gone and left the two of them alone, the Superintendent produced and lit a cigarette.

"You C.I.D. men can do what you like," he remarked, "I have to keep up appearances. Well, what do you make of it?"

"Too soon to say yet," Huskisson replied, hoping that the oblique reference to his smoking was friendly in intent. He had been standing by the fireplace for the last few minutes; he now resumed his chair.

"Of course, if this Carter can definitely identify the dead man as the driver of the car—or even is moderately confident about it—we've got something fresh to work

on. By the way, I suppose you've fixed up for the other three witnesses whom Brewin discovered yesterday to identify formally ? "

" Certainly. This afternoon. And of course we may yet get a reply to our S.O.S. ; but I am not very hopeful. I think we should have heard by now."

" Whilst I think of it, you might give me a chit to the manager of the Grand. I may as well test that line too."

The Superintendent scribbled a note, whilst the Inspector gazed thoughtfully at the coal-scuttle. He had an idea which he thought worth trying out, but saw no reason to mention it at the moment, especially as it might lead nowhere. Still, he was glad he had taken that stroll by the seashore.

" There you are."

The Superintendent handed him the note and he thrust it into his pocket. They sat in silence for some minutes. Then the Superintendent carefully extinguished his cigarette in a copper bowl on his desk.

" Sounds like the car," he said with a smile, so nearly apologetic that Huskisson felt happy again about his pipe. " Glad Brewin had the sense to get Carter along quickly."

The car-park attendant proved to be quite a decent, smart-looking fellow who had lost an eye, presumably in the war, and wore a black patch over it. He repeated his story, and though the Superintendent and the Inspector both pressed him hard he could not give any more exact description either of the girl or of the car. He remembered, it is true, that the Chrysler was not by any means brand new and that both the rear mudguards were a bit dented ; but as Huskisson remarked,

that might be said of a good many cars. Were the dents in any way remarkable in size or shape? Carter could not say.

"Well, we'd better have a look at the body," suggested the Superintendent, and led the way.

"Narsty business," Carter remarked. "Never could abide corpses in the war meself."

However he looked long and steadily at the dead face.

"I'm pretty sure that's the feller, sir. As I says, I didn't notice him partic'lar, but, well, I think so."

"Good," said the Superintendent. "That makes it worth our while to follow up this line of business. Why, Huskisson, what is it?"

The Inspector was staring almost incredulously at the body.

"Damme," he said, "I believe it's the man who lives opposite me in Elder Place."

CHAPTER VII

THE LADY IN THE CAR

"What!" exclaimed the Superintendent. "Good Heavens, man, are you sure? Who is he?"

"Moderately sure. Or it's a double. But as to who he is—that's all I can tell you. I've noticed him now and again, going in or out. Haven't the foggiest idea of his name, or his occupation. London's not a village, you know."

"Come along back to my room," said the other, feeling that the conversation was not one to which Carter should be privy. "And I don't think we need Carter any more," he added.

"Oh, let's hear the last chapter of his story first," Huskisson suggested, with a note of sarcasm in his voice.

"But he's told us all he knows, sir," Sergeant Brewin rashly interposed.

"Indeed!" said the Inspector, working off some of the annoyance which he felt with himself for not having made inspection of the corpse his first duty on arrival. "Indeed! And am I to understand the Chrysler is still in the car-park?"

"Oh no, sir," Carter began.

"Of course not," said the Superintendent testily. "Naturally, the girl came and removed it. It was hardly necessary to say that. Considering how we commented on the pains she took to get her ticket and so on."

"Quite so. Still, there'd be no harm in knowing *when* she removed the car."

"Carter's not sure." The Sergeant, undismayed, put in his oar again.

"That so?" queried Huskisson sharply.

"Yes, sir," was Carter's answer.

"D'you mean you weren't there when she——" the Inspector began.

"Oh no, sir. I was there all right, and remember her coming and driving off. 'Bout—well, I can't say more than that I should say it was about half-past twelve. Might be sooner."

"H'm. That's important. Sure it wasn't later?"

"Positive, sir."

"Good. Tells us something, eh, Super?"

"Yes." He spoke a shade dubiously, though he hoped that his doubts were not apparent to his audience.

Inspector Huskisson permitted himself a sharp glance at Sergeant Brewin, as if to draw his attention to the points which he had missed.

"Well, now, Carter," he continued his examination, "tell me one or two more things. First of all, what was the girl carrying when she came back?"

"Same as when she went, sir. Small green case—not much bigger than an attaché case, sir."

"No initials?"

"Not that I saw, sir."

"Where had she got the car ticket?"

"Why, in 'er 'and, sir. All ready, as you might say."

"H'm. D'you reckon the case was big enough to hold this fellow's clothes?" and he nodded at the corpse, almost familiarly.

Carter permitted himself to smile.

" What, shoes and all ? No, certainly not, I should say. Wouldn't hold more than enough for the lady—or so I should guess from what I hear like."

" I see. Thanks. So she walked up to you. Gave you the ticket and drove off ? Speak to you ? "

" Why, yes. I think she said something about 'avin' come to drive the car to the 'otel. That kind of thing. I didn't pay much attention. She gave me a bob over the regular charge, though."

" Any difference in her appearance the second time you saw her ? "

" Now you mention it, she'd got less colour on."

Huskisson smiled. " Looks as if the sea wasn't so bracing as they make out," he observed to the Superintendent, who smiled his recognition.

" But she didn't suggest to you that she'd deliberately disguised herself, so to speak ? " he put in.

" Oh no, sir. I wouldn't say that. Certainly not."

" And that's absolutely all ? "

" Yes, sir. She got in, started her up with the self-starter and drove off."

" Give you the impression that she was familiar with the car ? "

Carter thought hard.

" Now I come to think of it, she was a bit slow puttin' her into gear."

" As if she knew her gears by sight, not by touch, so to speak ? "

" That's it. And she drove off a bit slowly."

" Did you watch which way she went ? "

" Can't say I did, sir. You see, between half-past twelve and one——"

" Regular parade about then," the Superintendent completed his explanation for him, and Huskisson nodded comprehendingly.

" Still, you saw her general direction? She kept towards the town—the lower part, I mean? "

" Yes, sir."

With that the examination virtually ended, and soon afterwards Carter was dismissed, with thanks for his help.

" Very pleased," was his parting word. " Only I 'ope I 'aven't got the young lady into any trouble."

The Superintendent and the Inspector hurried back to the former's room, and Sergeant Brewin was told to stand by till he was wanted.

" Want to get through to the Yard? " the Superintendent suggested.

Huskisson nodded. He felt a little awkward about the telephone conversation ahead of him, and wondered how he could contrive to prevent the Superintendent from listening to it. He had a sudden inspiration.

" Strikes me, we'd better take another precaution first," he said. " The question of the dead man's identity is more or less static, if you follow me. That of the girl may want quick action. It stands to reason that very likely she set straight off back to London—they obviously came from there on Sunday morning. That gives us two lines. First, there's the car. Where is it? It's not likely she'll have kept it—certainly not, if she had a hand in the murder. Secondly, where did she stop on the way up to London? Or did she stop in the town here? I think it's worth trying—women are peculiar about meals, I know ; but this one must have had an earlyish breakfast, and she'd followed that with

a bathe. A bun was not very much to go on till she got back to London."

"Yes," said the Superintendent. "That's certainly worth following up. I'll see about it at once—no, don't you move. You telephone from here. I'll go and see Brewin outside."

Huskisson, thus left alone, put through a priority call to Scotland Yard. The Chief Inspector who had been on duty the previous night would hardly be there now ; he spoke to the Inspector who was in charge of the Department in the Chief's absence, and was rather relieved to know that his conjecture was right. He was met by chaff from an equal, where he might have met with reproof.

"What on earth are you doing at Prince's Bay, HHH?" Inspector Augur enquired mockingly. "Seems so queer, when the man whose murder interests you so much lives more or less next door to you here in London."

"Hell ! How did you know that ? " Huskisson asked, in reply. "That's just what I've rung up to tell you. I've only just seen the body and recognised it at once."

"Been having a swim, or doing a spot of fishing ? Bit late in the day, aren't you ? "

Huskisson, hoping he would not be overheard, and discreetly lowering his voice, explained, not very truthfully, that these local people were sticklers for etiquette, and that the Superintendent was out when he, Huskisson, arrived, and he had had to begin with other aspects of the problem. "Getting a little light," he added, optimistically, "but first of all, what's the fellow's name, and how did you get on to him ? "

"Anderson. John William Anderson. Profession :

obscure. Financier is the sort of term the papers will use. Address—well, you know that. Informant, his wife."

"Wife! Didn't know he had one. I've seen him, and I know he has a married couple to look after him—at least I fancy so. But—no, I've never seen a wife."

"They were separated. I reckon he was a bit—lively."

"Oh. I see. Well, that probably fits in. Am I right in guessing that Mrs. Anderson is not remarkably youthful and attractive?"

"Not youthful. And I should say not attractive to Mr. Anderson. A cut or two above him."

"How did she hear about it?"

"Wireless, I gather. We do live in stirring times, don't we? But you needn't worry. You're to stick down there—lucky devil; it's sweltering hot up here. Just let me know how you're getting on and you might send up a full report this evening, will you? Right. Then fire ahead."

Inspector Huskisson gave a clear and succinct account of the stage which he had reached in his investigations.

"Right you are," said Inspector Augur, when he finished. "The Chief will be glad to know you've got something to work on at your end."

"You think he wants me to stick down here? Hasn't the scene of operations rather moved to London? I think the locals here can tackle things now."

"Better not leave. You know the Chief's attitude when we are called in to a local case. Stay as long as we're wanted or so long as there's anything doing."

"I expect you're right. So long then," and Huskisson

hung up the receiver with a suspicion of a sigh. Then he brightened, when he remembered his pleasant impressions on his arrival.

He glanced at the clock on the desk and observed that it was getting on for lunch-time. He lit a cigarette and waited. Presently the Superintendent returned and told him that measures had been taken to try the likely places where the girl might have got lunch on her homeward journey.

"Fixed things up with the Yard?" he enquired. Huskisson told him that they seemed quite satisfied, but omitted to mention that the late Mr. Anderson's identity had already been discovered. He suggested instead that it was owing to the remarkable rapidity of the Yard that he now knew the name as well as the address of the dead man.

"Well, time for a bit of food," the Superintendent suggested. "Care to come along with me? I've had word the Chief Constable won't after all be over till tea-time."

"It's very good of you, but I think I'll put in an appearance at my hotel. I'd suggest you joining me, only some of the people here know you by sight, I expect, and it may be as well for me to be incognito at first, so to speak."

"Oh, that's all right," the other laughed, and they parted very amiably at the door of the Police Station.

Huskisson, however, decided on reflection to leave his hotel enquiries until later, and to take advantage of the daylight to revisit the esplanade. He hurried through his lunch, neglecting half the items on the imposing menu, because he wanted to get down to the shore ahead of the crowd.

In this he succeeded, though he noticed that on week-days the occupants of bathing huts mostly indulged in a picnic lunch on the spot.

First he paid flying visits to each of the bathing establishments, but without much success. It was certain that no spare suit of clothes had been left behind; it seemed equally certain that a girl could not possibly gain admittance to the men's changing-rooms, so that the young woman could not have removed the missing clothes even if her suit-case had been big enough to hold them—Carter after all might have been wrong in his estimate of its capacity.

The male attendants had already tried in vain to identify the dead man ; they explained that at the height of the season they could not possibly remember any but the most regular patrons. The female attendants were at the greater disadvantage because there was not even a photograph of the young woman. Huskisson however did ascertain that the attendants quite frequently were asked whether it was safe to leave valuables in the changing-rooms ; they always advised enquirers to leave such things at the ticket-office.

This led to a small discovery—rather in the nature of confirmation of the morning's work. At the ticket-office of the " central " bathing establishment—the one next to that to which Mr. Anderson's dead body had been carried, and the one nearest to the bandstand and parking place on the cliffs, the elderly woman assistant vaguely remembered that a lady—young, she fancied—had given in a small handbag ; no, not a suit-case, the sort of bag ladies carried—and had come back to get some money out of it. Yes, she had said something about paying for a chair. She had then

handed the bag in again, and as far as the woman remembered had come back and finally removed it not so very long afterwards.

Huskisson was about to express mild surprise that her recollection was not clearer, when it occurred to him that on a Sunday afternoon in August—or indeed a week day, too—the appearance of a young woman strolling about in a bathing-dress would hardly attract much notice.

The problem of Mr. Anderson's clothes became a puzzling one, but the Inspector put it aside for future consideration.

He now went back to the first section of esplanade and walked up to the man who appeared to be in charge of the boards on which countless snapshots were displayed.

"Are all these taken to order?" he enquired, and learnt that, on the contrary, the beach photographers strolled and paddled about and took photographs of groups and individuals, whether they wanted it or not; the victims then could come and identify themselves from the show-cases and order whatever number of copies they wanted.

"I see. And you put up each day's bag separately, so to speak?"

The man responded by waving towards his show-cases, which bore cards showing the date on which the photographs had been taken; he was too busy, taking an order from the fat and elderly father of a swarm of chubby children, to spend more time on so foolish a fellow as Huskisson appeared to be. It is part of the unwritten law of Prince's Bay that everyone knows his way about, and no one is visiting it for the first time.

The Inspector mulishly hung round until the man was free again. The interval of time he spent in careful scrutiny of Sunday's snapshots. He could not see one of the late Mr. Anderson, with or without a fair companion.

" I suppose you put 'em all up ? " he enquired. " A friend of mine thought he was taken on Sunday——"

" Those you see here are all *my* work," the man answered brusquely. " If you don't know the number of the photographer—or your friend's forgotten it—and the photo isn't there, you'd better try lower down —at A or B."

Huskisson took the advice and made his way to section B—not too hurriedly, for it was pleasant to saunter on such a day. At the next lot of show-cards he went through the same performance, but the finale was different. In reply to his question whether *all* the Sunday photographs were on the boards, the proprietor said, apologetically rather than angrily :

" Oh, my hat, another of 'em. I suppose your friend was taken by B 7 too, was he ? Well, you're about the twelfth that has been had."

" Why, what d'you mean ? "

" Seems as if someone's been having a joke. And a silly one, if you ask me. Walking round on Sunday with a camera, or what looked like one, and taking photos and giving his number as B 7—and then clearing off. And as this is Stand B, the people he took, or pretended to, come and kick up a row because they can't find themselves, looking all pretty. Seem to think it's my fault, too."

Huskisson assured the man that he at least bore him no ill-will. Certainly seems a funny trick, he said to

himself, and he wondered whether it had any connection with the murder. Though why it should he could not imagine.

He went through his entire performance again at the last stand—Stand A, in fact. The results were exactly as at the first one. He was forced to the conclusion that by ill-luck none of the regular photographers had taken a snapshot of Mr. Anderson. Possibly, of course, they had taken one of the girl, but unless she was accompanied by Mr. Anderson he had no means of knowing her. It would be particularly galling if the irregular performer did photograph them, and by his presence drove away the regular people.

"By Jove," he said to himself as he made his way gently up the steps to the bandstand, "I wonder whether there *is* a connection? Stand B is beside the place where, pretty certainly, Anderson and the girl changed for their bathe. It's the nearest place to the spot where the car was left. It's possible the unknown photographer took his B 7 from a glance at the stand. And a camera is a nice bulky receptacle—if it isn't really a camera."

He toyed with the idea, and decided that it was worth keeping in mind. There was no doubt a vast number of other and more likely explanations. But a murder is an odd affair, and odd affairs have a curious way of hanging together; though whether the Chief would stand for a hue and cry after a bogus photographer——

He sighed; and finding that he had reached the lawn in front of his hotel, he sat down in an arm-chair in the shade and hailed a waiter.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WIDOW IN THE CASE

Events in London had, as a matter of fact, begun to move almost of their own accord, at a time when Inspector H. H. Huskisson in his Chrysler was bowling merrily down to Prince's Bay.

The proceedings had been opened by a telephone message—a toll call from the neighbourhood of Epsom, from a Mrs. Anderson.

"I am told," she said in a cold, emotionless tone, "that a message was broadcast last night giving a description of a man found dead on the sands. From the description and some other facts of which I am aware, I think it is possible that it is my husband. As I am an invalid I cannot do very much to help, but perhaps you can send someone to see me, bringing a photograph. I can then give you further particulars."

And with that she gave her address and rang off.

The Chief Inspector's general policy, particularly in a case which seemed likely to cover a lot of country, was himself to remain impassively at Headquarters, with Inspector Augur by his side, and thence to direct operations, and check their results. Augur was indeed deputising for him on the Monday morning, and at once despatched Detective-Sergeant Dimsdale by car to interview the lady at Epsom.

Dimsdale was vaguely surprised to find that Mrs.

Anderson lived in a small but very attractive house, outside Epsom itself, and in surroundings which could properly be described as " countryfied." A tall, trim hedge and a row of trees almost hid it from the road ; the garden was extensive, and well-kept—trim turf and gay flowers. The hall in which he was asked to wait by a parlourmaid of the old-fashioned kind (who seem always to have been in one place for years however frequently in fact they have changed) was cool and large and furnished by someone with good taste. He had only to wait a minute or two before the parlourmaid reappeared and conducted him through a door at the far end of the hall, into a delightful drawing-room which seemed to run the whole width of the house, and had two French windows giving on to a broad verandah.

" Mrs. Anderson is on the verandah," she said, leading the way across the room, and without further words ushered him through one of the tall windows.

" Good morning. You are from Scotland Yard ? "

" Yes, ma'am."

Sergeant Dimsdale stood and regarded the lady who sat, or reclined, on a *chaise-longue*, a light wrap spread over her legs despite the warmth of the day. Beside her was a table with books and flowers ; a newspaper lay on the tiled floor ; a work-bag was on her lap. She was middle-aged, but something about her suggested that she might look older than the truth. She was very pale of complexion, and her dark eyebrows, and the large dark eyes beneath them, accentuated her pallor. The lines on her face were eloquent of suffering as well as an indication of petulance ; and her chin and lips did more than hint at considerable strength of will.

"Sit down, won't you?" she said, waving the Sergeant to an easy chair which evidently had been brought out from the drawing-room. He complied in silence. He decided that the lady was distinctly good-looking, and might have been a beauty not so many years ago.

"Perhaps you have brought a photograph of the unknown man?" she continued.

"Why, er—yes, ma'am," said the Sergeant, putting his hand into his pocket. "I—very sorry—I hope——"

The well-marked eyebrows were raised ever so slightly, and the ghost of a smile curved the thin lips.

"You need not be afraid of giving me a shock," she said, and held out a slender, almost emaciated hand, for the photograph.

She took it and gazed hard and steadily at it.

"Yes," she pronounced finally, "that is my husband—or his double."

There was an awkward silence. Sergeant Dimsdale had not expected this calm acceptance of hard facts.

"I'm very sorry, indeed," he muttered. The eyebrows again moved.

"Please don't feel obliged to offer any condolences," the lady in the chair replied, a nip of frost now in her tone. "I have had no use for my husband for some considerable time."

This time it was the Sergeant's eyebrows which were involuntarily lifted.

"We have been separated for some five years," the cold voice went on, as if in answer to the unspoken exclamation.

"Indeed, ma'am," said the Sergeant, who had now adjusted himself to the situation. "I understand then

that he did not reside here. Can you tell me anything which is likely to bear——"

The white hand was raised, as if to ask him to refrain from vain chatter.

"I shall be delighted to tell you whatever I can," she said. "But first I must ask a question or two. Do *I* understand that in all probability my husband was—murdered?"

"I fear that's so, ma'am. Of course, the inquest——"

"Oh, of course. However, it is as well to face probabilities. I must confess that as an individual, whilst I did not feel, perhaps, enough animosity against my husband to want him dead—far less to kill him with my own hands—I, well—disliked him so much that I fear I feel little or no personal animosity against whoever *did* kill him. That being so, I consider that I am left with my duty as a citizen—a member of civilised society—which is, to help the forces of law and order, without prejudice either way."

Sergeant Dimsdale commended aloud the soundness of her views; inwardly he was slightly shocked, and decided that the Chief would be a good deal interested in her expression of her attitude.

"Very well," she resumed. "I have spoken my prologue, so to say. I need hardly tell you that I had considered this eventuality before you arrived. An invalid has plenty of time to rehearse her conversation."

The reference to her health was made with the same cold impassiveness. The Sergeant led the conversation not without some adroitness, from this topic to one of more immediate importance.

"Are you quite positive you can identify your husband from that photograph, ma'am?" he asked. "You

see, the—er—body is at Prince's Bay, and I'm afraid it may be difficult to arrange for——"

She definitely smiled as she interrupted.

"I have very little doubt—no, I have none. But I quite realise that I must—view the remains is the usual phrase, I believe? Thank you. I'm afraid I can't travel much, but I feel sure that arrangements can be made. If there's nothing else for it I will go down there. I'm not so crippled as all that."

"I see. Thank you, ma'am. I think that, if I may, I'll ring up Scotland Yard at once and explain the position to them. May I do that? And then resume my interview with you?"

"Certainly," and she took up a small silver bell which was on the lower shelf of the table at her side.

"One moment," the Sergeant said, hastily. "I'd like to be able at the same time to report your husband's address."

"Quite so. Corrobation," she replied. "To the best of my belief his address was" (and she slightly stressed the past tense) "17 Elder Place, South Kensington. Shall I ring?" and she suited the action to the question, apparently confident of the Sergeant's answer.

The efficient maid reappeared with promptitude and conducted him to the telephone. He reported briefly to Inspector Augur, who laughed when he heard the address, though he forbore to explain why. As to the final and formal identification, it certainly would be best if the lady could go down to Prince's Bay; if she really couldn't—and anyhow it might be worth while to try and discover who her doctor was—then the body might have to be brought up.

"For goodness' sake, persuade her to go down," he

concluded, and Sergeant Dimsdale returned to the verandah, to explain matters to Mrs. Anderson.

" I have been reflecting," she observed, " and I have come to the conclusion that I should enjoy the ride to Prince's Bay. It is a longer one than I usually indulge in, but so long as my doctor does not object——"

" Who is he, ma'am, if I may ask ? Perhaps I could put it to him——"

" I hardly think he would act under Police pressure," she retorted coldly, " and I should prefer you to leave it to me to get his opinion. He is Sir Emmersly Hough, and usually regarded as a sound man, I believe." Indeed even the Sergeant knew the name and repute of that eminent specialist, and was silent, in some confusion.

" However," the lady went on, as if taking pity on him," he is coming to see me this morning. He will be here in about half an hour. You will be able, I expect, to wait and hear his verdict, and in the interval there may be other points about which you would like to consult me. Ah, yes ; if it will help to reassure you, I may say that I shall do my best to persuade Sir Emmersly to agree, since, in addition to the pleasure of the drive, it would be satisfactory to me to be certain that the dead man is indeed my husband."

" I really feel, ma'am," the Sergeant spoke awkwardly, " that I ought to warn you——"

" Pooh ! " said Mrs. Anderson. " Surely a wife is better entitled than anyone to know whether her husband's better dead or alive. And there's no need to wonder whether I had any hand in ending his existence."

She raised her hand again and held it up towards the sunshine, with a faint smile, so that its frailty was

transparently plain. The Sergeant began confusedly to explain that that was not at all what he had meant. The cold evasive tones once more curtailed his efforts.

"It will be simplest, Sergeant, if I tell you briefly something about myself, I think. I am thirty-five years of age—probably you will agree that I look more. I married my husband—my late husband—fourteen years ago, against my father's wish. I was headstrong and foolish, and my father was obstinate. My husband was then an employee in a bank in the Wiltshire village in which we lived. I believed that he was in love with me—without vanity I may say that I was good-looking in those days ; my father had no doubt but that he wished to marry me for my money. Well—my father was right. It took me just over a year to find out. I also found out—that my husband was a forger."

The Sergeant moved uncomfortably. This dispassionate recital caused him a queer feeling of shame. Didn't seem right in a lady, somehow, to talk so calmly about it all.

"I stuck it till my father died. I didn't want to—make things worse for him. By that time most of my own money'd gone. My father wasn't the unforgiving parent ; I inherited his fortune. But neither was he the kind to change his opinion ; the fortune was tied up so that my husband could not touch it. If he had gone more gently, perhaps I should have treated him generously ; as it was, I—learnt to take my own line. I gave him an allowance, and made it subject to good conduct. I didn't intend that there should be any—scandal, if I could help it. I paid him six hundred a year to behave himself."

There was another pause.

" Eight years ago I became an invalid. An accident —I won't go into details. No, nothing of that kind—no violence on my husband's part. This isn't a melodrama, Sergeant. The result was that I was tied hand and foot. I could still make sure that there was no scandal ; I couldn't keep complete control. Of course, my husband had left the bank long ago—he put it like that, but of course he was discharged, and only escaped gaol through my pleading with his employers, and making restitution. That is by the way. I daresay that he had been making his plans for a long time ; at all events, a year or so after my accident he proposed a separation. Apparently he had scraped up some kind of a business connection, and with my allowance could live on his own. In a word, I agreed, and at the same time raised his allowance to seven hundred. You see, I wanted to keep my hold on him. I knew that it wasn't enough to enable him to live—as he'd been used, but it was a big enough sum to make him anxious not to be divorced. Revengeful, I expect you'll call me. Very likely. I meant him to learn his lesson. That's all. I haven't seen him for four years and he's known all the time that if I heard anything discreditable—well, he'd suffer financially ; the only way in which he could suffer. He knew I should keep an eye on him, even if I was an invalid, tied to my chair here. He didn't know how close an eye I kept on him—through his manservant."

She smiled, very unpleasantly, the Sergeant thought.

" I took a lot of pains to ensure that he would engage the man *I'd* chosen—Crowther. I'd helped his brother, and to increase his loyalty, I made him a small allowance, too, so long as he remained in my husband's service."

She paused again, and then went on.

" It was Crowther who rung me up and told me about the wireless message. The maids here have a wireless, of course, but it would have meant nothing to them. I don't listen-in very often in the evening ; I get tired rather easily."

Sergeant Dimsdale cleared his throat and enquired whether Crowther had had reason to suppose that Mr. Anderson had gone to Prince's Bay.

" Certainly. He knew that he had gone there. Not for pleasure, though. A business trip."

Her expression changed to a somewhat malevolent one as she watched the Sergeant's face.

" Well ? " she asked, sharply. " Don't you believe that it was a business trip ? "

He shrugged his shoulders very slightly.

" There seems to have been a lady with him, ma'am," he ventured, slowly.

" If Crowther has not told me the truth——" Mrs. Anderson fiercely, but quickly and deliberately recaptured her dispassionate tone ; perhaps, thought Dimsdale, it's her health. It was as if she dared not show any emotion. " But I don't think he was lying—or even that he was taken in," she continued. " I fancy that once before my husband paid a visit to that neighbourhood, and that that time Crowther watched him all the way. Besides, Crowther had an idea that I employed someone else to watch as well."

" And did you, ma'am ? "

" No," she said, with a faint smile. " Only just from time to time, to keep them all up to the mark, if you understand me. And to divert suspicion from Crowther, too. My husband *expected* to be watched ; if he hadn't

had proof of it now and again in the shape of a rather obvious private agent, he might have wondered how I did it—and thought of his own household."

"I see. Well, I expect we'll have a talk with this man Crowther. He lives at the house in Elder Place?"

"Yes. And I believe there are two maids as well. Or rather a cook—Crowther's sister, she is—and a girl."

"It seems a large establishment, if I may say so, on an income of—let's see, you said £700, I think."

"Yes. I can only suppose that my husband's business brought in the rest."

"What was his business? Stockbroker——"

"Oh dear no. Nothing so definite. And I doubt if his references were good enough, so to speak. I really can't answer your question exactly. But he had a small office in Holborn (you'll find it in the telephone book) with a clerk or two, and called himself a general agent. I imagine that his method was to take advantage of someone's folly and buy cheap what he could sell dear."

"You can't say more exactly——"

"My good man, the less I knew about my husband the better pleased I was. When I heard about him, the news was almost invariably unpleasant. I was content to feel that only dishonesty on a very big scale would in his eyes make it worth while to lose my £700 a year; and I was equally sure that he was only capable of the meaner forms of dishonesty."

She closed her eyes and let her head fall back wearily against the cushions.

"I think that is all," she murmured. "It is tiring even to discuss these unpleasant topics."

The Sergeant rose to his feet.

"I greatly appreciate the frank way in which you

have spoken," he said politely as a prelude to leave-taking, and once more observed a smile dawn and be suppressed on the pale, thin lips. " Perhaps if there's anything more we want to know I may come again later ? "

" Certainly. But don't you want to hear what the doctor has to say ? I think I heard the car a second ago."

She rang the silver bell again, and the maid reappeared even more promptly. As the drawing-room door opened, the Sergeant heard the sound of a car drawing up on the gravel outside the front door.

" Porter, I think that is Sir Emmersly," said Mrs. Anderson. " Show this gentleman into the study, and Sir Emmersly here. Sir Emmersly will want to see him after he has seen me. Good day," she concluded, addressing Dimsdale. " Come again, if it's essential. As to Prince's Bay—I shall do as the doctor decides for me."

The maid curtailed the Sergeant's farewells and positively hustled him into the study, a small room in the front of the house ; it opened off the hall, and had a very unlived-in feel about it.

" Sir Emmersly waiting all this time," Porter muttered as she conducted him.

Sergeant Dimsdale metaphorically kicked his heels in the study for a good twenty minutes. There was nothing in the room to interest him so far as the present case was concerned. Its walls were lined with books, none of them recent ; and all those at which he glanced had what evidently was the bookplate of Mrs. Anderson's father.

He heard voices in the hall.

" In here ? " asked a male voice briskly.

" Yes, sir," came Porter's reply.

The door was unceremoniously opened and a typical example of a successful physician walked into the room, with an abruptness which somehow seemed in keeping with his appearance. He closed the door, swiftly but silently.

" H'm. You're the Scotland Yard man ? "

" Yes, Sir Emmersly."

" Good. Needn't give you my card, I see. H'm. I understand you want to know whether Mrs. Anderson can travel to Prince's Bay to identify a body."

" Yes. Of course, we *might* be able to arrange——"

" Come now. Either you want to know, or you don't. If you can arrange something else just as well, why bother to enquire ? Ah, you do want to know. Very well. The answer is Yes."

" I'm much obliged."

" On conditions. I fancy it may do her good if it relieves her of worry. But excitement is bad for her. Or violent emotion. It's up to you people to see that there is nothing of that kind. And let's be quite clear. When she gets there, she'll be there as an invalid. Understand ? Things must be made easy—invalid chair and so on. She'll go in her own car and take her maid with her ; she's a capable nurse. Right, then that is settled. Mind you, if there's trouble, and I find it's due to your not taking proper care, I'll see you get it in the neck. Not you personally. The Police. See ? Very well. Then it had better be to-morrow. I'm prescribing a sedative for her to-night. She'll be there about twelve-thirty—no, better say two-thirty—to-morrow. I'll see the maid and fix everything up for the journey. You'd better get

busy at your end. Naturally if it is not essential—you won't ask her to make the journey."

He crossed the room and rang the bell by the fireplace. He did not wait for it to be answered, but walked out into the hall.

"Ah, Porter," he began, as the maid appeared, "I want a word or two with you—just show this gentleman out first——"

And Sergeant Dimsdale found himself swept out of the house, willy-nilly. He made for the Police Station at Epsom and thence rang up Inspector Augur.

"All right, then," said the latter. "Sounds as if all that can wait. Best come and report to the Chief personally. Hold on a second, though. What about identification?"

The Sergeant reported the arrangements made and to be made; Augur listened without comment.

"All right," he said at the end. "I'll get through to Prince's Bay at once. They may decide to postpone the inquest."

CHAPTER IX

THE VALET AT HOME

It was past one o'clock when Inspector Augur put through his call to Prince's Bay, by which time Superintendent Hawkins had departed to his lunch. Augur reflected that he and Huskisson earlier in the morning had exchanged their knowledge of the dead man's identity and that Huskisson doubtless had passed on the news ; in the circumstances he thought it might be tactless to discuss the question of postponing the inquest with anyone but the Superintendent himself, and so merely left word that he would ring up again at about two o'clock. As a precautionary measure he jotted down the Superintendent's private telephone number.

When, a few minutes later, the Chief Inspector arrived at the Yard and summoned Augur, the latter was thankful for the failure of the trunk call ; for the Chief, having received a succinct report of the events of the morning, was little impressed by Augur's decision and commented, in a somewhat caustic tone, that he was sorry he himself had not come in sooner.

Inspector Augur reddened.

" You mean—there's no need for the wife to identify ? "

" I should imagine not. If she's not fit to travel—well, there's the man's servants, and his office. Presumably there's an office boy at any rate."

" Well, if she's prepared to take it on, sir——"

The Chief Inspector positively snorted.

" Doesn't it strike you that whoever killed this fellow —yes, Anderson—didn't want Anderson's identity to come out? What else does the removal of his clothes and so on mean? Well then, don't you think we'd be well advised to let him—or her—imagine the plan's worked, and not give it out to the whole world that within twenty-four hours we've overcome that particular obstacle? Right. Then get on to Mrs. Anderson or her doctor or both. Say that there's a mistake, about arrangements, I mean ; that almost certainly we shan't want *her* to identify. Look sharp."

Inspector Augur departed to his own room, wearing a chastened look. The Chief meanwhile put through a call to Prince's Bay and in a few minutes was in earnest conversation with the Superintendent, interrupted in the middle of his lunch.

" Good," he concluded. " Then that's understood. I'll leave it to you to put things right with the Chief Constable and the Coroner—if it's necessary. You have the inquest as arranged, and get an adjournment, if you can, to give us time to identify the corpse. And there's nothing new at your end? "

" Nothing," the Superintendent replied, " unless your man Huskisson's got on to anything. He's off on his own."

" Pulling together all right, I hope? "

And the Chief Inspector before he rang off was warmly assured that he need not worry himself on that particular score ; yet this reassuring news did not soften his manner towards Inspector Augur, who was by this time back again for fresh instructions.

" Fixed that with Mrs. Anderson, Chief," he reported, in a hopeful tone.

" Well, don't think that entitles you to rest on your laurels, man. There's the household at Elder Place, and there's the office. Send someone to each. Sergeant with a constable, I should say. Instruct 'em to pull in anyone who gives trouble—or doesn't give as much help as we'd like. And in particular to find out what this Anderson did to augment his allowance from his wife."

" Right, sir."

Just as the door was closing behind him, Augur was called back again.

" Then get yourself some food," was the final order. " I'll see Sergeant Dimsdale as soon as he's back."

Inspector Augur had thus an additional stimulus to rapidity, and by the time that the Chief was listening attentively to a detailed account of the interview with Mrs. Anderson, Detective-Sergeant Porritt was on his way to Elder Place and Detective-Sergeant Overbury to Barlow Chambers, the late Mr. Anderson's business address as given in the Telephone Directory. Each was in plain clothes and accompanied by a constable similarly clad. And finally Augur himself was consuming, with some ferocity, a succulent chop and reflecting, not without personal satisfaction, that since *that* was how the Chief felt, it was no business of a mere subordinate to point out that the deputation to Barlow Chambers would probably have to kick its heels for a good time before the office staff returned to work.

The petulance of the mighty is a stone thrown into a pond ; it makes itself felt in all directions. Thus while Sergeant Overbury, as the Inspector had rightly

anticipated, found himself confronted by a locked door, Sergeant Porritt made a bad start in his talk with Crowther, the murdered man's servant, merely because in his haste the Inspector had not explained the train of events which had led to the identification of Mr. Anderson.

The front door was opened by a little man, pale faced and somewhat furtive in manner, clad in the conventional garb of a " gentleman's gentleman." He looked enquiringly at the two callers.

" From Scotland Yard," said Sergeant Porritt impressively. " You're Mr. Crowther, I think ? "

" That's right," said the little man, and made haste to usher them in.

" Better step into the dining-room with me," he said. The Sergeant raised his eyebrows, surprised that one who was to outward seeming such a pattern servant, should behave as if he had no master but owned the house himself ; he and the constable, however, followed without demur.

Crowther closed the door behind them, then motioned to the chairs round the table, and sat in one of them himself.

" Bad business, I'm afraid," he said, shaking his head. " What's to become of me, I don't know. Jobs aren't so easy to get, in spite of what you read in the papers. However, I don't suppose that's what 'as brought you 'ere."

" What's a bad business ? " asked Porritt coldly.

" What ! D'you mean as it wasn't the master at all ? "

" See here, Crowther," the Sergeant spoke in a tone of warning, and produced his notebook as he spoke,

" you'd best be careful. Do I understand that you already are aware that Mr. Anderson is dead ? I shall have to ask you to explain how you know it."

Crowther stared blankly, then nodded his head like one of those toy mandarins which Victorian children will remember, and gave vent to a series of peculiar sounds which his intimates would have recognised as his " contemptuous laugh." And peculiar as the sounds were, the expression of his face left his present audience under no illusion as to his sentiments.

" That'll do now," Porritt said sharply.

" Oh, will it ? " Crowther retorted. " And you'd like to know 'ow I come to know of the master's being dead ? Well, I don't ; no more than you do. But seein' 'as it was me——"

" What ? "

" Give us a chance to finish what I'm saying. When the description of a man found dead at Prince's Bay was broadcasted last night, it was me as rang up Mrs. Anderson and said I reckoned it was her 'usband. *And* 'er maid's rung me up to-day to give a message as how she's recognised 'is photograph. That clear ? "

His brief outline had been delivered slowly and loudly, as if he was addressing a selection of harmless lunatics ; the Sergeant inwardly abused Inspector Augur for putting him in this position.

" *I* see," he said, rather grandly, and trying to give the impression that he had merely been confirming his previous information ; but Crowther was not deceived.

" No wonder it's not safe so much as to sit on the sands at Prince's Bay," he observed witheringly, " if the Police aren't no brighter than that."

" *All* right," said Porritt, " never *you* mind that. You just attend to me and answer my questions."

Crowther shrugged his shoulders.

" Been waiting all the morning to do that," he said. " Go ahead."

The Sergeant cleared his throat, glanced at the constable at his side as if to call him to attention, and requested the little manservant to give an account of himself, Mr. Anderson, the length of their acquaintance and so forth. Crowther evinced no reluctance and showed an astuteness (or an honesty) which the Sergeant naturally did not appreciate, by making plain the dual nature of his duties—that is both to Mr. and to Mrs. Anderson.

" As for me references," he concluded, " Mrs. Anderson can speak for me as well as anyone. Not but what you'll be wastin' your time if you start poking about into such things as *my* past."

" And the rest of the household ? " asked Porritt, whilst the constable feverishly wrote down dates and addresses which had figured in Crowther's chronicle.

" There's me sister. Cook, she is. Mrs. Sarah Lawton. Widow. Been here a matter of six years, on my recommendation. Likewise she too has A1 references. And housemaid—slip of a girl, as you might say. First place. Niece of a friend of me sister's——"

" Quite a family concern," the Sergeant commented.

" Well, naturally," Crowther agreed scornfully. " A very 'appy 'ousehold. And bin so these three years—that's since Elsie come."

" Elsie being the housemaid ? "

" Right in one." Crowther's tone was one of mock admiration.

" And before she came, things weren't so happy? How was that? "

" Why, we 'ad a couple of terrors before she come. Such table manners. Coo, you'd hardly believe it."

Sergeant Porritt smiled in his turn.

" Ah, no worse trouble than that, eh? "

" Can't 'ave much worse in the 'ousehold, to my way of thinking," he was sternly corrected, and changed the subject.

" Now this Mr. Anderson," he said. " What kind of a man was he? I don't mean in appearance. What kind of an employer? And what did he do? "

" Oh, just ordinary sort of feller," was the unilluminating answer. " Off to work each morning. Dined out as often as not. Occasional party 'ere—but *not* the gay kind, if you follow me ; three men, and a game of bridge."

" Did himself well? "

" Oh yes. Very comfortably. And left things to me and Sarah—Mrs. Lawton, that is. An easy place—leastways——" And for the first time he hesitated.

" Well? " the Sergeant queried.

" You see, I 'ad the job of keeping an eye on 'im, as you might say. And though 'e was quiet enough at 'ome 'ere, I wouldn't go so far as to say 'e preferred it so. 'E liked a bit of life now and again. Nothing serious, as you might say, or I'd 'ave seen to it. 'E was pretty afraid of Mrs. Anderson stoppin' 'is allowance, if you ask me. Still, a bit of a dinner and a dance now or a drive in the car. And if you ask me I didn't see no 'arm in it no more than 'e did."

" And I suppose the trip to Prince's Bay was nothing out of the ordinary."

"Well now, that I can't say. Mr. Anderson gave me to understand it was a business trip."

"Business trip. But——"

"Oh, I know. Funny way to do business, sitting by the sad sea waves. Still, there's business *and* business."

"And what was Mr. Anderson's?"

"General agent. That's what 'e called 'imself. More than that I can't say. Ready to do any sort of deal, if there was enough in it. Not on the crook; I don't mean that—just—well, like them financiers."

Sergeant Porritt was fairly well satisfied with this not over-clear explanation, but he was less certain of Crowther's meaning as regards the expedition to Prince's Bay, and questioned him further on this point. He could only explain that Mr. Anderson had been extremely cheerful at the prospect of the trip, in a kind of subdued way; he had definitely said that he had some business to do down there, and Crowther was convinced that that was the truth—he was sure that his master had not known that his own servant was one of Mrs. Anderson's spies, so he had no reason for wishing to deceive him; on the other hand, he was always very circumspect in his amusements and certainly would not have told Crowther openly that his trip was merely a joy-ride, innocent or otherwise. But it was difficult to think that a mere business visit, even if it took him to a lively and pleasant seaside resort, would have put him into quite such a good humour. Nor was that all. He had been unusually particular about his appearance ("always was a bit dressy," the servant added in parenthesis), and he had taken a suit-case with him.

" Nothing unusual in that, I suppose ? " the Sergeant suggested.

" Yes *and* no," came the reply, rather slowly. " You see, 'e was most particular that I packed everything of the best, but 'e wouldn't take evening clothes with him. From which, between you and me, I guessed 'e meant to spend the night at a 'otel somewhere—p'raps on the road, as you might say."

" Yes, I see," Porritt agreed. " If he'd been staying with business friends he'd probably have taken at any rate a dinner-jacket. Mind you, that's not an inevitable conclusion."

" You surprise me. Still, takin' it all in all, I don't reckon 'e'd have been so careful to take a pair of 'is newest silk pyjamas *and* 'is best dressing-gown to a 'ouse where they don't change for dinner. And besides that—well, Mr. Anderson didn't often go away for a night like that. Specially on a matter of business." He gave the Sergeant a sharp, sidelong glance and added, " If you ask me, Mr. Anderson made fewer friends than enemies, in that line. But probably they'd know more about that at the office."

There was a pause in the conversation. Sergeant Porritt tapped the end of his pencil on the table and debated his next move.

" You've given me something to go on with," he said at last. " And now what about yourself, and the others ? What are you going to do ? "

" Blest if *I* know," the little man replied gloomily. " It's all right for the moment. Mrs. Anderson said she'll pay us board wages, like, till things is straightened out, but after that——"

He shrugged his shoulders, and observing that the

Sergeant was not very interested in the immediate future, assumed an angry look.

"Now there's two things to be done," the Sergeant resumed, not noticing the other's expression. "First I'll get you to let me have a list of the things Mr. Anderson took away with him. Likewise a description of his clothes *and* his suit-case. Ah yes, and number of his car. And secondly, I'll just take a look at his papers and so on."

"I can fix up the description," Crowther said, "but I dunno about the papers. Strikes me you need a warrant to go ferreting about like that, eh? And what's more you'll need a key of the safe."

"We'll see about that," Porritt replied. "Now, Davis" (to the constable), "you can make out the list, with Crowther here, and meanwhile I'll be looking for papers. Where's the sitting-room?"

"I should say you'd best start on the study," said Crowther, apparently accepting the situation. "This way."

He led them to the usual "back room," so generally to be found in London houses. At the door he paused and observed half defiantly, half apologetically, "Afraid you won't find it in A1 order. What with one thing and another, it hasn't been touched to-day."

"All the better," said the Sergeant. As he spoke the telephone in the hall behind them rang sharply, and Crowther looked at him enquiringly.

"Run along." Porritt led the way back again. "Just see who it is. Don't answer."

The servant took down the receiver. "Hullo. Yes, it is. Who is that?" he said, and then paused, his hand on the mouthpiece.

" Someone wants to speak to Mr. Anderson," he said. " What'll I say ? Won't give 'is name."

The Sergeant took the receiver from him.

" Hullo ! No, don't cut me off——"

" Hullo ! " a voice was saying.

" Hullo," said the Sergeant in turn.

" Who's that ? " said the voice. " Is that the great Mr. Anderson ? "

" No, sir," answered the Sergeant, in the tone of a stage butler. " Mr. Anderson, sir, is out."

" Oh, is he ? "

" Will you leave a message, sir ? "

The man at the other end chuckled.

" All right, I will," he said. " Just say—let me see. Yes, say this. Just say that a Little Bird tells me that Mr. Anderson had a very amusing time yesterday, and that if Mr. Anderson likes I can show him a bird's-eye view of himself. Got that ? "

" Yes, sir." The Sergeant managed to conceal his excitement. " And the name, sir ? "

" Godfrey."

" Mr. Godfrey, sir. Very good. And the address ? "

" Oh, Mr. Anderson knows *that*, I think," and the unknown rang off. Porritt worked the arm of the receiver feverishly up and down, and as he did so he thrust the receiver itself into the constable's hand and bade him have the call traced at once. Then he turned sharply to Crowther.

" Who's Mr. Godfrey ? " he asked, and observed that the expression on the little man's face had lost all its truculence. He looked, all of a sudden, distinctly alarmed.

" Oh, Mr. Godfrey. Yes——" he stammered.

" Know him, do you ? Well, let's hear who he is."

" I don't rightly know him," he protested. " But I think 'e's a young gentleman that called 'ere once or twice to see Mr. Anderson. And I had me orders not to admit him."

" Don't you know his address ? "

" No, I don't. All I know is that the first time 'e came, 'e said 'is uncle was a very old friend of Mr. Anderson's, and like a fool I let 'im wait till Mr. Anderson came and then there was the 'ell and all of a row, and I nearly lost me place."

Meanwhile the constable had been struggling with the telephone exchange, and now waited an opening to address the Sergeant.

" Well, Davis ? "

" Bit of luck, Sergeant. It was a toll call. They'll be able to trace it pretty quick. And let us know at the Yard."

" Good. And now, Crowther, let's hear what else you know about this Mr. Godfrey."

" Give you me solemn word I don't know a thing more," Crowther protested. " Don't even know what the row was about."

Sergeant Porritt suspected that the servant was lying.

" Well, we'll come back to that later," he said, threateningly, " and perhaps by then your memory will have improved. And meanwhile, let's have a look into the study. Hullo ! " he said, trying the door, " the room's locked."

" Yes," Crowther reminded him. " I told you the room's not been touched yet. Course it's locked. Most particular, Mr. Anderson is—was, about the rooms being locked at nights."

Porritt turned the key and they opened the door. The room was in semi-darkness, heavy curtains covering the window. He switched on the light and glanced round. The study was smallish and very simply furnished—two leather arm-chairs by the gas-fire, a flat-topped writing-table in front of the window, a small bookcase, a good-sized dark green safe, and on the walls four or five reproductions of what may be called "respectable nudes." A thick Turkey carpet covered the floor.

The Sergeant had an eye well trained to notice detail in a scene of this kind. Swiftly and without a word he stepped across to the safe. He knelt and examined the handle closely, and then with a grunt gave it a gentle pull.

The safe door swung open.

"Just *how* particular was Mr. Anderson?" the Sergeant asked, turning his head to look at Crowther who stood watching him open-mouthed.

CHAPTER X

THE CLERK IN THE OFFICE

To outward seeming, Sergeant Overbury lacked Sergeant Porritt's solid (not to say stolid) qualities. He had not the airs and graces of Inspector Huskisson nor the clerkly restraint of Inspector Augur. He had instead a slightly vulpine look, and when he was bareheaded and revealed a large bald patch surrounded by a gingery fringe he suggested nothing so much as a defaulting secretary of a fraudulent insurance company. Hanging aimlessly about the City in the neighbourhood of Holborn, he might arouse a little suspicion or a little attention, but not too much of either.

Hanging about, therefore, was an art of which he could claim some mastery, and he was the less disconcerted when he found the office of "W. Anderson" in Barlow Chambers barred against him. He told his henchman to amuse himself for ten minutes and then return; he had noticed a small cigarette shop just round the corner—the constable could not do better than pop in there.

"Here's a photo of this chap Anderson," he added. "See if they know him by sight in the tobacconist's."

The constable (a confirmed non-smoker) departed, vaguely conscious that the task imposed on him was merely a way of killing time, but conscientiously ready to carry it out. The shop proved one of those where

cigarettes, tobacco and sweets are sold to the public at less than the approved retail price ; this practice, though it appears to benefit the public without injuring the manufacturer, is for some reason frowned upon by the Tobacco Interests, but is not unwelcome to the public. Apparently the close of the lunch interval is the chosen moment for clerks and shop assistants to replenish their pouches, and the little shop was crowded.

Business was briskly conducted, and the constable found that his turn had come to be served before he had decided what to buy. He gazed vaguely at the well-stocked shelves, murmuring " I'd like—er—a packet of well, what shall I have?" whilst the customers behind him shuffled their feet impatiently.

The perky damsel behind the counter glared at him in silence. Inspiration fortunately came to him.

" What about—er—one of those new tins I've seen advertised—you know, that slip easily into your pocket."

" Here you are," she answered promptly, handing him an elegant tin. " Made to measure, and fits the body like a glove. *And* your change."

He held his ground.

" Can I have a word with you, miss ? " he said.

" Business—as usual," she retorted, " *and* we keep a chucker-out."

She jerked her head towards a small undergrown boy in a dark corner, who was gaping open-mouthed at nothing in particular. " Come along. Yes, sir?" and she turned to another customer.

The constable admitted defeat, and retreated to the street, where he gazed angrily at his purchase. He moved up and down for five or ten minutes, until the

rush-hour seemed to be over and the tobacconist's establishment peaceful.

He re-entered, and met the indignant lady's frown with a disarming smile.

"Sorry, miss," he said, "I'm from Scotland Yard. I didn't realise how busy you'd be just now."

She sniffed, and gazed at him a little less sternly, but still with an air of suspicion. He produced the photograph.

"Feller who works in an office near here. Making a few enquiries about him. Thought an observant young lady like you might know him by sight."

She took the photograph in a disdainful finger and thumb, looked at it closely, and handed it back.

"Never set eyes on him, to the best of my knowledge. Anyway, not one of our regulars."

"I suppose the boy wouldn't know him?" the detective suggested.

"What, Percy? Gawd, no. There isn't anything that he knows, that I've discovered yet." And the detective could not deny the reasonableness of her judgment. He thanked her and departed in search of the Sergeant.

The latter in the meanwhile had contrived easily enough to get into conversation with the caretaker of Barlow Chambers, who was busy sweeping the dust from one part of the entrance hall to another. Nor did it take more than a few minutes to discover that the said caretaker had got the job mainly because his brother-in-law was in the Metropolitan Police—a fact which apparently guaranteed his own force of character and muscular strength.

Sergeant Overbury considered that the porter's connection with the Police was close enough to justify

his revealing his own identity. He explained that he had to make enquiries about Mr. Anderson merely as a matter of routine.

" Nothing to do with a fraudulent bankruptcy or a false income-tax return," he added, grinning.

" Nor yet a divorce neither ? "

The porter's answering grin was something more than sly.

" What, that strike you as more likely ? "

The porter winked broadly.

" Oh, you never know," he said.

" Pretty typists ? "

" No. Nothing like that. Fact, there's only a couple of clerks."

It is a singular convention, persisting despite the existence of Women Clerks' Federations and the cantankerous efforts of feminists who lost their main interest in life when they got their vote, that a " clerk " is a male.

" What's the idea then ? " asked the Sergeant, giving his hat a rakish tilt and producing and extending a cheap-looking cigarette-case.

" No smokin' whilst on duty—for me," the porter answered. " Thanks all the same. But I hadn't nothing particular in mind when I spoke of divorce. Though now and again Mr. Anderson has gone off to lunch looking as if he was dressed up as a bird-fancier."

" Nothing unusual, eh ? What sort of chap otherwise ? "

" I really don't know. Never see 'im for weeks—'cept just when he comes in or out. Gives me a nod if he sees me. The clerk pays me bill for cleaning and that."

" And the clerk ? "

" Mr. Pepper, that is. What you might call ordinary."

" I see. Well, all the better for me if it's Pepper who'll be there when I call in a few minutes. But you say there's two clerks ? "

" There was two. But t'other left—got the sack I daresay—about a fortnight ago."

" Did he, now ? And d'you know what's become of him ? "

" Can't say I do. His name ? Let's see now."

The porter thoughtfully tugged at the lobe of his right ear.

" Dammit, now. What was the name. Pepper and—what goes with pepper. You know."

" Salt, mustard," Sergeant Overbury suggested hopefully, but a shake of the head was the reply.

" Potts, of course," the porter burst out, after a brief silence, and the Sergeant smiled. By this time the occupants of the various offices were beginning to drift back after their lunch.

" Tell me when this Pepper comes in," Overbury said quietly, and, lighting a cigarette, gave himself up to contemplation of the vast and grimy board which confusingly set out the names and numbers of the different firms in the building. The porter, not to be outdone, resumed his active idleness with the broom.

Suddenly he coughed, and as Overbury turned, gave a sideways jerk of his head towards a stooping figure, in rather shiny black clothes, which was just about to mount the stairs.

" Right," said Overbury, " I'll pop up in a minute."

He walked outside and glanced up and down the street. He caught sight of the constable and signalled to him to come along.

" We'll just walk upstairs," he said, when the other joined him, " the clerk's just got back." And without undue haste he led the way, pausing to murmur a farewell and a word of thanks to the porter. On the way up the stone stairs the constable reported briefly his failure to get any news from the tobacconist, and realised that his first impression was right ; the Sergeant had not wanted or expected any more.

When they reached the office door, the Sergeant tapped on the grimy panel of opaque glass which composed its upper part.

" Come in," came faintly and rather quaveringly from within.

A thin man, of middle age and undistinguished aspect, clad in black coat and striped trousers and wearing a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles, confronted them from behind a pedestal table. He had, apparently, risen to his feet to greet them and there was something curiously defensive in his attitude and expression. Rather surprisingly, this look of apprehension vanished as his two visitors came into full view.

" Mr. Pepper, I think ? " the Sergeant began, inauspiciously, it seemed ; for the look of alarm returned.

" Er, yes," the clerk said, in a weak and squeaky voice, " but I presume it's Mr. Anderson whom you want to——"

The Sergeant smiled reassuringly—that at least was his idea, but the truth was that reassuringness was by no means his strong suit. Fortunately the constable's appearance was one of blameless innocence, and so calculated to balance matters.

" No, it's you I wanted to see, Mr. Pepper," said

Overbury. "Let me explain. I'm from Scotland Yard," and he held out his warrant-card.

Mr. Pepper took it with trembling fingers and blinked at it.

"But—but I don't understand——" he said.

The constable's eyes widened. It appeared to him that this was highly suspicious conduct, but the Sergeant, as if reading both men's thoughts, embraced them both in a positively reptilian smile and explained that he merely wanted to ask Mr. Pepper a few questions about Mr. Anderson.

"And I suggest we do it in there," he added, nodding at the door of an inner room, which obviously was the late W. Anderson's sanctum.

"Oh, but—suppose Mr. Anderson——"

"He won't come back," the other interrupted, almost brutally.

The clerk with a bewildered air followed meekly into the other room, which presented a marked contrast to the outer office. It was comfortably, almost luxuriously, furnished; a handsome writing-desk, a well-padded revolving chair, a capacious arm-chair, also upholstered in solid leather, a round table and a couple more chairs, and a walnut bookcase, glass-fronted, vaguely recalling the days of Queen Anne.

Immediately he entered this room the clerk lost, as it were, his protective colouring. It would have been quite easy to walk through the outer office without noticing him, so well did he blend with the rather dusty and battered appointments, its trays of papers, filing cabinets and ugly cupboards. It was easy to imagine that even if he had been using one of the

two rather antique typewriters, one might have believed that an invisible ghost was tapping away at the keys.

In the sanctum he was as blatantly out of place as a bluebottle in a glass of milk, and Sergeant Overbury automatically registered the very different impression which the two rooms gave of the business prosperity of the tenant who occupied them.

However, he turned sharply, bade the constable shut the door, and told Mr. Pepper to sit down.

"Be a bit of a shock for you," he said, in quite a kindly tone.

"What's—what's he done?" quavered Mr. Pepper.

"Gone and got himself killed," was the answer, accompanied by a wholly misplaced smile.

"Gor!" said Mr. Pepper, and his pale face went positively green. Then, "What's to happen to *me*?" he asked; and later on the careful Inspector Augur was destined to note how selfish a view both clerk and valet took of their employer's demise. Very human, perhaps, but somehow so prompt a reaction was a clue to that employer's character.

"That I can't say," Sergeant Overbury replied, and added, "Mind you, it's not absolutely certain that he's dead. It's just that a body has been found which is believed to be his. That's the first thing I want to see you about—we shall want you to identify it. So let's have your address and so on, so that we can give you detailed instructions in due course."

Whilst the constable, to whom he had previously delegated this routine business, was carefully noting the address in Battersea, Sergeant Overbury's sharp eyes roamed round the room, and noted another

article which previously he had overlooked—a large but unobtrusive safe, brown and solid-looking ; another point of comparison—for Inspector Augur to note later on.

He turned sharply on Mr. Pepper again, with a smile that resembled a snarl.

" What's Mr. Anderson's business ? " he asked.

Mr. Pepper explained that it was of a miscellaneous character. His employer bought things when they were cheap, to sell when they were dear, and he did not much mind what the things were. " You can see the books, of course," he added, and the Sergeant agreed that this probably would be necessary.

" Flourishing kind of business ? " he next asked. " Pay you a decent wage ? "

Mr. Pepper coughed deprecatingly, and blinked behind his dusty spectacles.

" Not—not a very large salary, perhaps," he said and named a very modest figure. " But of course I only do—well, the clerical work, you know. Mr. Anderson himself did—I suppose it'd be called the executive work. And jobs aren't easy to get nowadays—so I wasn't in a position to grumble."

" But the business ? " Sergeant Overbury reminded him fiercely that the question had been in two parts. He leant forward and thrust his long and pointed nose towards Mr. Pepper.

" Oh, the business. Yes, well, of course I don't know all the details. But so far as it passed through my hands—no, I should not call it very lucrative. Mind you, I'm not in possession of all the facts. But I should guess that the part which came through my hands didn't give a profit of more than—oh—a few hundreds

a year. Deducting rent, and—er, salaries and so on, you know."

The nose seemed to grow sharper, and certainly moved nearer.

"What part of the business *didn't* go through your hands, Mr. Pepper?"

The anæmic clerk tittered nervously.

"Well, of course it's hard for me to answer that—for the very reason that it didn't pass through my hands. If you'll excuse my saying so."

The last phrase was added to prevent the detective from imagining that he was being scored off deliberately.

"Still, you aren't such a fool," the other went on unperturbed, "as not to have a pretty shrewd idea?"

"Oh, as to that. Well, yes. A general idea." He coughed and reproduced his nervous titter, and altogether showed a difficulty in coming to the point; and the Sergeant wagged his head and rapped his long and bony fingers impatiently on the table. "It's—er—rather awkward. Especially if Mr. Anderson isn't really dead."

The Sergeant refrained from any comment, but no eyes ever shouted more loudly or clearly, "Oho! A Rat."

Mr. Pepper tittered again, and removed his spectacles. He wiped them and contrived at the same time to finger them, and thus added to his embarrassment by the discovery that he had entirely obscured the sight of his left—or more efficient and straightforward—eye.

"It's—that's not the only thing. I—er—I suppose that I ought to have—well, reported it, or something.

But then, it's only a matter of one's suspicions. And to lose one's job——" He sighed dolefully, and looked up nervously at his interrogator. He was rather agreeably surprised to observe (perhaps it was due to his right eye) that that gentleman's expression suddenly suggested a cunning yet sympathetic understanding of a poor man's temptations. " I get you," it seemed to say, " don't I often feel like it—and do the same ? " and horrific and wholly groundless visions of Police corruption swept like storm-clouds through Mr. Pepper's mind. However, they brought courage in their train.

" He only let you see—the straight business, eh ? "

Mr. Pepper nodded.

" I'm not *sure* there was anything crooked. But one or two incidents led me to suspect "—he dropped his voice to a wavering whisper—" blackmail."

" No ! "

" Yes. And not only that. Something as like thieving as one lump of coal is like another."

Sergeant Overbury positively twinkled with glee.

" Can you give any particulars ? "

" No. It's just that once or twice there were people who called——"

The victims, it seemed, these were ; but to his intense disappointment, the Sergeant could extract no helpful details whatever about them—only a promise that Mr. Pepper would do his best to remember. Still, his description of their conduct seemed to support his theory. Had he any other reasons ? Yes, he had.

" Until about three weeks ago—to be exact eighteen days," he said, " there were two of us. Two clerks, I mean."

" Ah, yes. Mr. Potts," Overbury put in, knowingly. Mr. Pepper looked surprised.

" Potts ? " he queried.

" Yes," said the other impatiently. " That was the name of the fellow who got the sack, wasn't it ? "

" Dear me, no. Potts. Why, I know no one of that name."

" But I thought—well, what was the fellow's name ? "

Mr. Pepper revived his titter.

" Rather a curious one. The young fellow was of Dutch extraction, I fancy. Korn. Julius Korn."

The Sergeant silently anathematised the porter, the more violently because he was conscious that the constable had thrown at him a sidelong glance of surprise—and some amusement.

" Well, go on," he said, and the disconcerted clerk became aware of a rift in the cloud of geniality.

" Oh, yes. As I was saying," he tittered, and once more attempted to clean his spectacles, as if hoping thereby to alter the detective's expression, " the—er—reason for Korn's dismissal was—we were pretty sure : of course we talked it over, you know. I mean . . . No. Anderson's reason didn't sound a very *real* one, as you might say. . . ."

" Come along. What *was* the real reason, in your opinion ? "

" Well—er—just that Korn—very foolishly—went into the inner office—in here, you know, without knocking. At least, he knocked but Mr. Anderson hadn't told him to come in—— You can't hear a sound through the door or walls."

He came to an abrupt end, and looked up like a

scraggy puppy, hopeful of praise. His reward was a cold stare.

" There must have been more to it than that? "

" Oh, yes. In a way I suppose there was. Mr. Anderson was just telephoning. Korn heard him say—or so he told me—something about ' Then you'll kindly have it ready in cash. And I'll collect it in person. Or else I may get angry.' "

The Sergeant's spirits rose again, and though once more the clerk could not give any supporting particulars—beyond the date, which was that of Mr. Julius Korn's departure—the story rang true and seemed to fit the general theory. But he had by no means done with Mr. Pepper yet.

CHAPTER XI

THE TEAM AT WORK

Whilst Sergeant Overbury was doing his best to cajole and frighten the ineffective clerk into giving a coherent account of the business methods of his employer, whether living or dead, Sergeant Porritt was applying the moral pressure of his bulk to the problem of the unlocked safe.

The servant apparently was so astonished by the discovery that words failed him.

"Come, now," the Sergeant said sternly, once more revealing an activity in contrast with his build by the agile way in which he rose from his knees and towered over his victim, "was that safe kept locked or unlocked as a rule?"

"Locked," Crowther answered huskily. "Never knew it to be unlocked before."

"Tried it now and again? Oh, I don't mean to suggest anything more than curiosity——"

"Well, of course in the interests of Mrs. Anderson I may now and again——"

"Quite so. And have you ever seen the inside of it?"

"No. Never."

He spoke very decidedly, and did not flinch under the scrutiny which the Sergeant gave him from beneath a frowning forehead.

"What did Mr. Anderson keep in it? The silver or——"

"No. That's all in the cupboard in the pantry—and in the dining-room. So far as I know, 'e kept papers and that in the safe. I daresay money too."

Unless the man was an exceedingly good actor, and he gave no such impression, one thing was certain, that the finding of the safe unlocked had come as a complete surprise.

"Any idea when you last made sure it was locked?"

Mr. Crowther's eyes assumed a far-away look; suddenly he brightened.

"Might be worth while to ask the girl—Elsie that is," he suggested. "She dusts 'ere, in the ordinary way. It's only that things being upset-like to-day——"

"Yes, yes," the Sergeant cut him short impatiently, "fetch her along."

He was not very hopeful; it was unlikely that the housemaid tried the door of the safe every time she dusted the room.

"Rum go," he murmured to his henchman, when they were alone. He scratched his head, and whistled softly as he looked about him with renewed interest in the room.

Very soon Crowther returned, bringing with him a youthful but unattractive maid, palpably alarmed at the prospect of interrogation. She was small and much be-spectacled, and nervously twisted a corner of her rather grubby apron. However, frowned at by Crowther and encouraged by Sergeant Porritt, she managed to tell her story fairly well. The important point in it was that she was quite certain that the safe had been locked when she dusted the room on the Sunday morning.

She explained that she always gave a polish to the brass lever handle ; she and the Sergeant jointly demonstrated to the latter's complete satisfaction that if the safe had not been locked, the fact would certainly have been revealed by the polishing process.

At this point the cook was added to the conclave ; the three domestics failed to offer any explanation of the opening of the safe, and each swore that he or she had never even handled the key of it. On the other hand, it became apparent that on the previous evening the house had been untenanted between the hours of seven-thirty and nearly eleven-thirty, and to this point the Sergeant addressed some enquiries. The cook explained that she had spent the evening with some friends in Streatham ; the housemaid the afternoon and evening with her mother in Brixton ; Crowther was not able to give so precise an account—he said he had been out most of the day for a spin on his motor-bicycle, a confession at which the Sergeant had difficulty not to smile, for he found it hard to picture the little man as a speed-fiend.

" Bit of a mechanic, I suppose ? " he hazarded, to be answered by an indifferent shrug.

None of the three had noticed anything amiss, either on Sunday or that day ; but for the opening of the safe, no question, apparently, would possibly have arisen of whether someone had entered the house. Nor did a careful and expert examination of the hall and front door by the detectives discover anything out of the ordinary.

" Funny thing," the Sergeant observed, looking suspiciously at the little group. The housemaid loudly protested that she had told the exact truth.

"Tell you what, Sergeant," Crowther suggested, rather diffidently, "why not search the 'ouse? For keys, I mean. You're welcome so far as I'm concerned. I don't see 'ow else we're to satisfy you that none of us knows nothing about 'ow the safe come to be open."

"Very well," the Sergeant agreed. "From your point of view, I suppose it'd be fair. And at the same time you'd better come along with us, in case one of you notices anything else that's amiss."

And with that he carefully re-locked the door of the little study and slipped the key into his pocket, and proceeded to a thorough investigation of the rest of the house. The proceedings were laborious in the extreme, but the result may be described in a word—nothing. No safe key was found, and nothing to suggest that the house had been broken into, or even entered by a stranger.

Sergeant Porritt took earnest counsel with himself and decided that he had better return to Scotland Yard and report progress in person. He sternly warned the household that on no account was the study to be entered; to which Crowther replied briefly that he need not worry about that, for there was no duplicate key.

The two detectives departed, but whereas Sergeant Porritt betook himself to the Yard, Constable Davis was instructed to make a few further enquiries locally; in particular he was to try to discover whether anyone had been seen in or about the house during the previous afternoon when all the servants, in theory at least, were absent. Of course their accounts of the way in which they had spent their time would have to be checked; and that fellow Crowther would pretty certainly be wanted at the Yard, for a thorough examination. It

was all very fine for him to be so vague about where he had been on his motor-bicycle ; obviously the vagueness was exaggerated—for there was no wireless set in the house in Elder Place.

He reported, not to the Chief Inspector but to Augur, who expressed his approval of what had been done. He made notes of the four points which could be dealt with by ordinary routine methods—the checking of the cook's and the housemaid's outings, the search for the missing car, the number of which had been secured from Crowther, and the tracing of the unknown telephonist.

He reflected for a minute or two, then, " Now, Sergeant," he said, " you'd better get back to the house again—get in touch with Davis, of course—and go through that study with a toothcomb. Bring all the papers along here. Oh, yes ; and bring the servant—Crowther, yes—as well. The Chief will probably want to talk to him himself."

Altogether the scene of action seemed to have shifted itself pretty thoroughly to London, for it must be admitted that Inspector Huskisson was passing the time very pleasantly in a shady corner of the lawn outside the Grand Hotel, Prince's Bay : gently sipping a long cool drink (non-intoxicating, be it added) and watching the gradual flow of visitors from the hotel to the town and the shore. There was, of course, method in his indolence ; he did not want to start his enquiries amongst the hotel staff whilst there was an abundance of inquisitive guests to overhear. How fortunate, he reflected, that for once duty and inclination walked hand in hand.

Nor was the Superintendent occupied with the case ; to explain matters to the Coroner and secure his assent

to an adjournment had been easy enough, and the summoning of the few witnesses had been a simple matter and entrusted to a youthful constable. In fact, the Superintendent had descended abruptly from great affairs to small, having busied himself with the case of a missing car—removed, oddly enough, from the car-park by the bandstand somewhere about half-past one on the previous afternoon.

"Still, there's nothing to connect it with the other business," he said to himself. "Most likely it's just another of these joy-riding cases. Lord knows we've been lucky to have so few of 'em down here, compared with what they have in London *and* in some other places I could mention," and he almost patted himself on the back for the good conduct of Prince's Bay—until he remembered the body in the deck-chair.

And whilst these fortunate folk at the seaside were enjoying a period of calm, it must be confessed that in another way Sergeant Overbury was also enjoying himself. For while the imperturbable Porritt was vainly searching every nook and cranny in the Elder Place residence, he was probing the secret soul of Mr. Pepper, and extracting some very useful scraps of information.

By this time he had exhibited much the same ascendancy as that of a snake over a rabbit.

"This Korn," he demanded, "let's hear all about him."

Mr. Pepper did his best. He painted the picture of an efficient but uninteresting youth, a placid and hard-working subordinate. He conveyed the impression that Mr. Anderson had treated him with needless severity.

"I'm sure Korn would not have attached any special significance to the conversation he overheard," he said.

"But he did when he got the sack for hearing it, eh?"

"N-no—I don't think so. I think he just felt a little bit grieved—couldn't see why it mattered. But of course he realised that a rule is a rule. I expect that was his Dutch blood," he ended with a little giggle.

"Did he talk about getting his own back? Any threats?"

"What, Korn? Dear me, no. A very peaceable fellow. Quite a pacifist. I believe he used to attend debates—but of course that wouldn't interest you."

Sergeant Overbury, however, was interested in everything, and details were carefully written down.

"And where is Korn now?"

"I really couldn't say. I'm sure I'm very sorry. You see, he wasn't very sociable—or perhaps I'm not. At all events, we met in the office, you know, but not outside. And Mr. Anderson paid him a month's salary in lieu of notice and he went off there and then, and I've not heard of him since. As a matter of fact, though"—and he coughed deprecatingly—"I *believe* he's gone to Glasgow—to a new job."

"Ah, indeed. And what makes you think that? Something he said?"

"Er, no. It was like this. You mustn't misunderstand me——"

"Do get on with it; or else I *am* liable to misunderstand."

"Dear me, yes—I'm so sorry. In a word, then, he—that is Korn, you know—left a letter on his desk when he went out to lunch. About a couple of days before he was dismissed, I should say. We used to go out to lunch in rotation, if you understand me——"

"And you read the letter when he had gone out?"

"Not exactly read it, but I had occasion to look for a paper on his table, and—well, I just ran my eye over the letter, you know. My—er—impression is that it was the offer of a job. A Dutch firm. I expect some relation——"

"What was the firm?"

Obviously Mr. Pepper realised that if he remembered the name too easily he would stand convicted of having read the letter more carefully than he pretended; but Sergeant Overbury, informing him somewhat brutally that he did not care a jot whether he had read all Korn's letters or not, wrung from him in a minute or two the name of a large shipping agency.

"According to you then," the Sergeant continued, "this fellow Korn didn't particularly mind getting the sack, as he'd another job to go to—and at a better salary."

"Yes. That is my impression," the other replied, with a feeble attempt to be entirely accurate.

"And *now*, Mr. Pepper"—the detective raised his voice and Mr. Pepper positively jumped—"what about you? Did you manage to read all Mr. Anderson's letters, too? What about the side of his business which you were *supposed* to know nothing about?"

The clerk protested, quite spiritedly, that he had told the exact truth, though he admitted under pressure that he would perhaps have studied his employer's private affairs—or would at least have just glanced at them—if he had had any opportunity. But Mr. Anderson was very careful always to keep the safe locked, and to carry the key on his person.

" See if it's locked now," the Sergeant said to the constable, and the latter reported that it was.

" You see, I've told you the exact truth," the clerk began, but was brusquely interrupted.

" Many people come in to see Mr. Anderson ? " Sergeant Overbury asked, and Mr. Pepper blinked at the rapid change of subject.

" Oh, no. Not a great many. Mostly by appointment, of course."

" Any ladies ? "

" Ladies ? "

" You know what I mean."

A glance at the Sergeant's expression showed the clerk clearly enough that " ladies " was exactly what he did not mean.

" No. Nothing of that kind," he replied, with an air of shocked respectability.

" Commercial travellers, I suppose ? "

" Of course. Trying to sell blotting-paper and that kind of thing."

" Many of them ? "

" Certainly they are fairly numerous."

" Thank you. And that being so, I may take it, I suppose, that in one way or another that front door of yours opens quite a number of times during the day and you never know who's going to come in ? "

" Of course I don't know," said Mr. Pepper, with a display of irritation. " You can't possibly see through the glass panel—I mean it's opaque glass."

" So I observed," the Sergeant retorted, contemptuously. " But I also observed that you were scared stiff when we came in."

" Scared ! " said Mr. Pepper indignantly.

"Stiff!" the Sergeant repeated.

"Why—really—I—positively insulting——" the clerk mumbled.

"Cut it out," Overbury broke in. "Of course I know well enough that some people in this world are heroes and some aren't; and I don't see that it's any use blaming them *or* Providence either way. But I simply can't believe that you're scared stiff every time that office door opens."

There was a painful pause.

"*Now* then," Overbury resumed, once more thrusting his sharp nose close to Mr. Pepper's pallid face. "Who did you expect to see walk in this afternoon?"

"N-no one in particular."

The Sergeant shook his head.

"It won't do," he said. "Of course you're not obliged to answer if you don't want to; but this is a pretty serious matter, and if you won't answer *me*, I'll have to ask you to come with me to Scotland Yard, to see the Chief," and he signed to the constable, who rose to his feet majestically.

"Very well," the clerk gave in at once. "It isn't that I don't want to tell you anything I can. But after all I do know something about what's evidence and what isn't. And really I don't think that my—well, conjectures are evidence at all."

Sergeant Overbury leant back with an air of weary satisfaction.

"Evidence," he said, "who's talking about evidence? That comes later. All I want at present is a line that will lead to evidence. And if I'm not mistaken that's what you can give me. Now then; who were you afraid we were?"

"A Mr. Muirfield—James Muirfield, I think. Wait a minute, I believe I've got his card," and fumbling in his breast-pocket he produced a worn pocket-book and from it, triumphantly, a clean visiting-card.

The Sergeant took it and observed with satisfaction that it was engraved, and not printed, and that it bore Mr. Muirfield's address, in a street off King's Road, Chelsea. The clerk watched him, as if he expected that his tormentor would at once dash off in search of Mr. Muirfield. He was rapidly disappointed ; for the Sergeant in turn pocketed the card and then looked up sharply.

"For Gawd's sake get a move on," he said, "let's hear the whys and wherefores of Mr. James Muirfield."

Mr. Pepper tittered, though he seemed anything but amused.

CHAPTER XII

ABOUT AN INVENTION

"I don't know a great deal," he began, with his usual circumlocution, "I mean, only one side of the affair."

Sergeant Overbury moved impatiently and his scanty moustache seemed to bristle ferociously; the clerk hurried on.

"The affair began some time ago—no, I think it is essential to begin at the beginning. As I know it, that is, of course. About—oh, I should say six months ago a man named Muirfield came to see Mr. Anderson. Appearance? Well, not so old and not so young. And medium sort of height. A dark moustache. I'm sorry, but that's the best I can do. Well, he came by appointment, he said. They had a longish conference and parted on very good terms. Mind you, I've no idea what they talked about. Then there was an interval. I believe this Mr. Muirfield came back; again by appointment. This time they parted on less good terms. Mind you, quite friendly, but—— Well, I vaguely recollect—vaguely, you know—that Mr. Anderson brought him out through my office to the door. He was telling him he was sorry, but there it was. The thing was no good: not practical. He said something about having had a telephone message to that effect. The plans would be back in a day or so; probably they were in the post; and he—Mr. Anderson, that is,

would send them on to Mr. Muirfield. Of course he—Mr. Muirfield, I mean—tee-hee, I'm afraid I'm explaining very badly—he was downcast, if that's the right word."

Mr. Pepper smiled nervously and paused. He received an imperative sign to resume. He cleared his skinny throat convulsively, and once again essayed to clean his spectacles.

"The next I heard—or saw—of Mr. Muirfield," he went on, "was one day when he called here. Mr. Anderson was out. He was sorry to hear it, but quite pleasant. Left a message to remind Mr. Anderson that he wanted his papers back. When I delivered the message, Mr. Anderson—well, scowled: said he didn't know what he was talking about. If he called again, he was not to be admitted. 'Simply a try-on,' he muttered to himself."

Mr. Pepper delivered this in a ghostly parody of a Lyceum melodrama. Sergeant Overbury was not impressed.

"And did he call again?" he asked.

"Yes!" said the clerk excitedly. "Several times. Twice when he came, Mr. Anderson was in; but I would not admit it to Mr. Muirfield. I told him to write. He was rather abusive."

"When did he give you this card that's in my pocket?"

"Oh, I think on the second call. That was the fourth, of course, really, wasn't it? Yes."

"And that's all?"

"No. Not at all. He's called, oh, twice since then. And the last time he was—almost violent. I am alone here—Mr. Korn had left then—and he positively forced

his way into the inner office ; this room, you know. But as it happened, Mr. Anderson really was out."

He giggled and tittered ; met the stony stare of the Sergeant, and continued hurriedly :

" He insisted on telling me all about it. At least, that was what he called it. But it was his side of the story of course. He said he'd brought his invention along to Mr. Anderson—I didn't gather exactly what it was. Something to do with wireless, I believe. Mr. Anderson—whom he'd met at a dinner, I remember —had submitted it to an expert, and had told Mr. Muirfield that the expert had said it was no good. But instead of showing him the expert's report *or* handing back the drawings—well, he just shut up like an oyster. And Mr. Muirfield said he was a dirty thief, and had simply stolen the invention, knowing it wasn't patented or protected. I ventured to say that it sounded very odd that it wasn't patented, but that only annoyed Mr. Muirfield all the more. He said he'd never imagined he was dining with thieves, and so on. Most offensive ; and I don't think he believed me when I assured him I knew nothing about it. Still, I managed to convince him the papers, whatever they were, weren't here."

" That was a guess, I take it ? "

" Not altogether. You see—tee-hee—the first time Mr. Anderson saw him he took away from the office in the evening a rather bulky parcel ; the one which this Mr. Muirfield brought in with him. And Mr. Anderson had never brought it back here again—I was quite positive of that. Mr. Muirfield quite understood," Mr. Pepper added, as if to hint that the Sergeant ought to be equally reasonable, " and in fact he asked what

was Mr. Anderson's private address. Of course I wouldn't tell him. So he went."

He assumed an air of virtue and courage.

"I daresay he reckoned the Telephone Directory would tell him as easily as you," the Sergeant commented, grinning, and pricking the balloon of the clerk's little conceit. "Seen this fellow again?"

"N-no, but between us two, I—well, I've been rather expecting him. I must admit I haven't been looking forward to a visit."

"And when we burst in, unceremoniously, you thought it was the inventor back again?"

"Yes," he tittered. "A positive relief, I can assure you when I learnt it was the Police instead."

"I gather you know him by sight?"

"Oh yes. At least, I should recognise him. He's—well, tall and rather sallow. Small dark moustache. Rather bright eyes, if you follow me."

Sergeant Overbury made no comment on the improvement in the clerk's memory, but regarded him with a malicious air, like a small boy wondering where to plant his next kick on a surprised school-mate.

"And what did Mr. Anderson say to all this?" he finally asked.

Mr. Pepper reddened.

"He laughed. All very fine for him. He was at least as big and strong as Mr. Muirfield. I'm—well I've not got a strong constitution."

It must be recorded with regret that the Sergeant was unfeeling enough to laugh too. Then he rose to his feet.

"Well, I think that's about the lot," he said, and the clerk's face brightened immediately. "I've no doubt

we shall send someone round to look at the books—so don't play any monkey tricks," and once more he shot a baleful glance at the unimpressive Mr. Pepper, and then cut short his protests.

" And what's more," he went on, " I think that here and now I'll have a look through this room and see if I can find anything with a bearing on the ' private business ' of Mr. Anderson."

" There's only the desk and the safe," Mr. Pepper ventured, " and they're both locked."

" Daresay I can manage the desk," was the reply, delivered with a significant leer. " As for the safe—well, I shall put a seal on it, see ? And probably we'll break it open later on—if need be. All right," he continued, as the clerk stood trying nervously to utter a protest, " you pop out to the other room. I'll leave the door open—so as to be at hand if this inventor chap tries to assault you."

Mr. Pepper understood clearly enough that the real intention of the open door was to enable an eye to be kept on himself. Outwardly meek, though inwardly full of indignation, he betook himself again to his shabby desk and his untidy papers, and steadily refused to manifest any interest in the proceedings in the inner sanctum. As a matter of fact, the detectives drew a blank with the desk ; it was clear, after the contents had been examined with minute care, that if any records existed in the room of Mr. Anderson's mysterious business they must be in the safe ; and means to open that were lacking. True to his word, the Sergeant placed imposing seals on it.

" Well, good afternoon, Mr. Pepper," he said, as, followed by the constable, he slipped into the outer

office. " Most likely, we'll meet again. And if we do—well, I hope for your sake I shan't find out that you've been keeping anything back."

Mr. Pepper coughed, and swallowed convulsively.

" There's—er—there's just one thing," he murmured, and almost cowered as the Sergeant turned sharply back from the outer door, crossed the room, and perched himself on a corner of the desk, indifferent to the fate of the papers which suffered in the process.

" Oh, *is* there ? " he enquired.

" Y-yes. It's—er—awkward, in a way. You asked about—er—ladies, you know. I told you—it was quite true—that none ever came here. But I—mind you, it's only my impression, I *don't* know—oh, quite so, yes, of course. Yes. The fact is, that from time to time Mr. Anderson used to be extra smart. Buttonhole and so on. Once " (here Mr. Pepper not only giggled with exceptional shrillness but also blushed slightly) " he came back with a peculiar mark on his shoulder. Er, powder."

The hungry wolf reappeared in the Sergeant's expression.

" Go on."

" Yes. That's really all. Except that—well, Mr. Anderson's been smartly dressed more often lately than he used to be. And once—this was very exceptional—a lady rang up. Rang up the office line, I mean. Not the private one in the inner office."

Sergeant Overbury nodded, as if to say that the existence of the two distinct lines had not escaped his notice.

" Usually," the clerk continued, " Mr. Anderson would have been furious at such a thing——"

"So it *had* happened before?"

"Yes. But not for—oh, over a year. And he was very angry. But this time, he seemed—oh, almost pleased. Preened himself," Mr. Pepper concluded, finding the right expression in the recollection of a sentimental film which he had lately seen.

"What did she say, this lady?"

"Just a message to Mr. Anderson that she might be ten minutes late for lunch."

"What was her name?"

"She wouldn't give it. Said he would know."

The Sergeant demanded to know where Mr. Anderson usually lunched on these occasions, but Mr. Pepper was quite unable to help him. "Somewhere in the West End," was all that he could suggest, and with that Sergeant Overbury had to be content. He delivered a final instruction to the clerk to try and remember some more things of the same kind, and to let him know at once if he did. Then he unbent so far as to thank him for the help he'd already given, thus showing a sound appreciation of the Pepper psychology; for when the office door shut behind the two detectives, it enclosed a weedy little individual who already had begun to weave a startling story, to be recounted that night to his equally insignificant wife, of how he had handled the Scotland Yard people. "Just put two and two together for them: told them what to look for, and where to look: showed them they haven't a monopoly of wits." Altogether he was aimed straight for a state of mind where he would in fact come to believe his own story and would, if he could think of any more details, take pride in badgering the Police about them.

Meanwhile in the entrance hall of Barlow Chambers,

Sergeant Overbury had halted for a brief consultation with his assistant.

"Fact is," he observed, rather mutinously, "they oughtn't to send you out without telling you all there is *to* a case. I don't know a darn thing how much they've already collected about this Anderson. I reckon, though, we'd better take no chances. I'll hike back to the Yard, and you can put in a couple of hours on the lunch business."

He laughed at the puzzled look on the constable's face.

"Don't mean you're to have another lunch yourself, my boy. I mean the Anderson lunches. Possibly the porter here has some idea where he went as a rule. Or—now let me see."

He whistled softly through his teeth, in a singularly tuneless way. His eye lit up.

"Risquetti's!" he ejaculated. "That's the ticket. Try Risquetti's my boy. Fills the bill nicely. Not too far away, not too dear, not too bad—and not too respectable. Bet you a florin to a peanut that's where the old boy took his lady friends. Try his photos on the head-waiter."

The constable indicated his understanding, and set out.

"Make it an hour," the Sergeant called after him. "If I've guessed wrong, come straight back. It'll be probably necessary to publish the photos if I *am* wrong."

The other waved his acknowledgment of the supplementary orders and plunged boldly into the traffic towards an island.

Half an hour later, Inspector Augur was listening

intently to the Sergeant's concise account of his doings.

"Well done, Sergeant," he said at the end. Just the right man, Sergeant Overbury, he thought to himself, to handle the sort of fellow the clerk seemed to be. Perhaps he'd have got more out of Crowther than Porritt had done. However, there was merit in each man's method.

"You'd better dictate a summary," he went on, "so that I can put it before the Chief this evening. He'll have to decide about that safe. It's a bit awkward of course—perhaps, though Mrs. Anderson's permission would——"

And he fell into a thoughtful silence, which the Sergeant had no hesitation in interrupting, and thereby rubbed a little of the gilt off the Inspector's opinion of him and his methods.

"What about this Mr. Muirfield?" he asked. "Want me to look him up?"

The fact of the matter was that Overbury detested the job of dictating his reminiscences, as he put it. But the Inspector was doubtful whether the Overbury method was suitable for a man of fiery temperament, as this Mr. Muirfield appeared to be.

"No," he said slowly, looking out of the window and so outwardly oblivious of the Sergeant's expression of disgust, "I think the Chief had better decide about that too. You see," he added, "it depends a good deal upon what's inside the safe in the office. I should judge that one thing that *isn't* there is that bundle of plans and things."

He glanced back at the Sergeant, to whom this remark of course conveyed little or nothing, since he

was not conversant with what had happened at the Elder Place investigation.

" Sorry, Sergeant," Augur smiled. " I forgot you'd only seen one side of this business. And it strikes me it's got the devil of a lot of sides. A case usually has to start with. Well, we'll leave it at that. Get on with your summary, and the Chief shall decide the programme. I expect he'll want to talk things over with you," and thus tactfully he removed the seed of grievance from the other's soul.

When the Sergeant had withdrawn, the Inspector sat and prodded his blotting-pad with a red pencil, a favourite trick which occasionally produced pictorial results worthy of our most advanced artists. He was concerned not only to sort out in his mind the series of rather broken and slender lines which already had been laid down, but also to decide just how long to wait before he put a general report before the Chief. He'd give it a bit longer, he decided, and ten minutes later was glad that he had so decided, for the two detective constables who had been put at Overbury's and Porritt's disposal in quick succession emulated the Sergeants' successes.

" This Anderson's well known at Risquetti's," the second constable was saying when the telephone bell rang.

" Porritt here," Augur heard, " Davis has just come in. He's got a fresh bit of news."

CHAPTER XIII

A LOCAL CONFERENCE

Let it not be thought that Inspector H. H. Huskisson was so indolent or so undisciplined as to spend all his time on the lawn of his hotel. As soon as he judged from the efflux of visitors that comparative tranquillity reigned within, he made his way to the manager's sanctum, declared his identity and presented the Superintendent's introduction.

But his excellent credentials and the manager's ready help were of no practical value. Nothing was known of " Mr. Smith " save that he had failed to appear at the hotel. His room had been booked by telephone—a trunk call from London. The superior young lady who admitted to having " made the reservation " could only add that she understood that Mr. Smith had been speaking in person. She had said something about the fullness of the hotel, and the man, evidently and correctly divining that this was her way of expressing dubiety about booking a room in the height of the season on the strength of a telephone call, had informed her, a little haughtily, that he was an old client.

This, then, suggested (though it was far from proving) that the earlier entry which Sergeant Brewin had discovered and at which Superintendent Hawkins had been disposed to scoff, was indeed the record of a

previous visit by Mr. Anderson. Huskisson was thorough, and the staff annoyed ; he insisted upon the past records being turned up. The trouble was all for nothing ; the particulars were too meagre to be of any help at all. He removed the register, so that Mr. Smith's signature could in due course be photographed, though he admitted to himself that he could not conceive that this would be of much use.

He could find no one who remembered Mr. Smith in person ; nor was Mr. Anderson known by any other name—the photograph, which Brewin had left on his first visit, had not been recognised.

The Grand Hotel, then, seemed a blind alley : and Huskisson, the old register under his arm, made his way to the garage, collected his car and drove up to the Police Station.

Superintendent Hawkins was busy elsewhere ; he had left a message to say that he would be back by four o'clock, to meet the Chief Constable. He had also left the surgeon's report, and this the Inspector studied carefully. But only one new fact seemed to him to be of interest—a few particles of sand appeared to have been driven into the wound. Apart from this, the simple facts were that death, which probably had been instantaneous, had been caused by a round, pointed instrument ; and the flesh round the wound had been severely bruised.

As the Superintendent had done the day before, Huskisson tried without much success to visualise the weapon which had caused the wound. He also considered the method of its concealment. After all, the blow had probably been delivered from in front. True, Mr. Anderson might have been asleep, or he might at

any rate have had his eyes fast shut, in the midday glare ; yet even so the murderer presumably made his way through the Sunday crowds. How about a large box—or a dummy camera ?

Another point of interest also occurred to him and led him to make a very careful examination of the deck-chair in which the body had been found. He made a note that he might want to know at what angle the chair had been—if by chance anyone could say. The appearance of the wound was such that the weapon seemed to have entered the body at right-angles, so to speak : it had the same appearance as a thrust delivered horizontally, at a man standing upright, would have had. Conceivably from the angle of the chair some indication could be attained of the height of the assailant. But the thought of the chair suggested another possibility ; had the blow been delivered from behind ?

The chair itself was a new one, strongly made ; it had, too, a kind of safety device which prevented it from collapsing in that distressing way which deck-chairs have. This explained how it had been possible to deliver the violent blow without flattening the chair and its occupant on the sands. Finally, the chair itself gave some evidence of the violence, for the canvas was distinctly torn and stretched where it was nailed to the wooden frame ; the companion chair, its twin in age and appearance and evidently, like it, a " this season's model," bore no similar signs of rough treatment.

Inspector Huskisson decided that nothing more was to be learnt from the chairs. There was still plenty of time before the meeting with the Chief Constable, so

he returned to the Superintendent's room and put through another call to London. He knew by experience the tendency of Headquarters to get peevishly excited if the man on the spot did not keep them well-informed of his doings.

He was put through to Inspector Augur.

" The Chief's busy, old man," said the latter. " Yes, really. And I ought to be with him, too. We've got on to one or two small lines here which may lead to something bigger. Oh, of course ; we'll let you know the instant it's any use. Now let's hear your news, HHH."

Huskisson's report was largely a negative one, and Augur in tactful terms pointed this out.

" I know," said Huskisson. " In fact, I'm not sure that there's much to be picked up at this end—as I told you before."

The other laughed.

" Wait and see," he suggested. " And, anyhow, be thankful you're out of London in this weather. That all ? Oh, by the way, I'd better explain the Chief's idea about the inquest," and this he proceeded briefly to do.

" Right ! " said Huskisson. " I'll back up the Superintendent if there's any difficulty with the Coroner. And now look here : I want you to put up to the Chief one or two suggestions I've got to make. The first is this."

He related the peculiar business of the bogus photographer.

" What's the idea ? " asked Augur, and the other explained his theory—" a very temporary one," he added—that a dummy camera might have been used to conceal a weapon.

"Besides which," he observed, "a photographer could easily have walked bang up to Anderson——"

"Assuming Anderson didn't know him by sight."

"Or else that he was disguised. Or she."

"She. D'you think a woman could have——"

"Why not? Though, mind you, it's not likely. And the point of my suggestion is that there was a *man* pretending to be one of the regular photographers."

"Quite so. Well, it's interesting. And for an extra reason, that one of the things we're on to here—or may get on to—rather suggests that photography is somehow mixed up in this business," and he related the affair of "Godfrey's" telephone call.

Huskisson laughed rather ruefully.

"Doesn't seem to hang together," he said. "If there was a real camera, that does in my idea of the way the weapon was concealed; and, besides, if this fellow Godfrey was the photographer—or knew the photographer—he surely knew too that this bird Anderson was dead."

Augur agreed.

"We'll see what the Chief makes of it," he suggested. "Anything else?"

"Well, no. Not yet. It seems to me that we've got, as far as Prince's Bay is concerned, to try to get news of the car and the girl. That's a certainty. And secondly, *if* the Chief thinks it's worth while, we might have a shot at finding the sham camera-man, or shall I put them on to that anyhow?"

Augur considered the point.

"Perhaps it would be just as well," he said rather doubtfully; "we'd better take no risks."

" Very well," HHH answered. " And now, have you any other ideas for me to tackle ? "

" Only one," Augur replied, " though there may be plenty when the Chief's sorted out the stuff we've amassed from different sides. It's this. This Anderson apparently pretended that he was going down on business to Prince's Bay. May be true, or may not. But if it was true, it's likely that he had some kind of appointment, and if so, the man—yes, or woman—he was going to see would ask for him at the hotel, or something."

" Nothing doing," said Huskisson promptly. " No one but the Police has shown any sort of interest in him. That's straight from the hotel staff."

" Pity."

" Well, if you ask *me*, I should say that Anderson's business was with the pretty lady he brought down in his car. Can't you identify her ? "

" Not yet. But we've a line to her."

With that, and a promise on Augur's part that he would be kept informed of the progress of events in London, the conversation terminated, and Huskisson, feeling fairly contented with himself, decided that a pipe was the best help to pass the rest of the time until the Chief Constable and the Superintendent put in an appearance.

The Superintendent was the first to arrive. He was hot, and inclined to be apologetic for the extent to which he had left Huskisson to his own devices.

" That's perfectly all right," the latter assured him. " As a matter of fact, things don't seem very bright, do they ? However I've just rung up the Yard, and they seem a bit more hopeful there."

"Oh. Anything startling?"

"No," was the indifferent reply. "At least, not so far as they told me."

The Superintendent looked at him rather sourly. He met the look with a smile of friendly amusement.

"I'm not keeping anything back," he said, emphatically. "It's just that they've not started to put two and two together. They've promised to let me have the story as soon as it's worth while, and I'll pass it on at once."

The Superintendent's face cleared, and he apologised amiably for his suspicions. Before anything more could be said, voices were heard in the passage and the door opened to admit Major Dillon.

"How are you, Superintendent?" he enquired, heartily.

He was introduced to Huskisson, and slightly raised an eyebrow at the Inspector's dapper appearance. The smart grey flannel suit and the tie which as nearly as no matter declared that its wearer had been educated at Eton was indeed in rather painful contrast with the Chief Constable's attire.

"Well," he said, "Scotland Yard showing themselves as smart as usual?"

Huskisson reddened angrily, and the Superintendent hastily intervened with a few platitudes about cordial co-operation.

Major Dillon grinned.

"Put my foot in it, have I? Sorry. I really didn't mean it. I'm just as glad as the Superintendent here that the Inspector's come along to help us," and his tone became so cordial that Huskisson's resentment vanished.

"Well, let's get to business," the Chief Constable

proceeded, and listened attentively while the other two in turn outlined the facts of the case.

" Then as I understand it," he said, when the joint narrative ended, " we're only following one line here at the moment—this car."

" Yes, sir."

" You think that's all we can do ? "

Huskisson coughed.

" There's a very faint possibility that a peculiar thing I hit on this morning may be connected with the case," he said, conscious of Hawkins's reproachful glance. " I was just about to discuss it with the Superintendent when you arrived, sir."

Once more he expounded his theory of the photographer. Major Dillon looked enquiringly at the Superintendent.

" We can certainly try it," said the latter, slowly, " though I reckon it'll be difficult to get anything very solid. The one thing people may look at but certainly don't see when their picture's being taken is the man who's taking it."

" Strikes me as sound psychology," Major Dillon commented with a laugh. " Still, we'd better try. And now about the car," and he and the Superintendent fell to discussing ways and means of intensifying the search for traces of the return journey—or rather its movements after it left the car-park.

" May be here still," the Chief Constable had suggested, and rather startled the other two. Hawkins had happily assumed that the girl came from and had gone back to London, and Huskisson was guiltily aware that he had allowed himself to be influenced by this assumption.

"All I can say is," the Superintendent asserted a little uneasily, "that it wasn't abandoned here. I've just been looking into a case of a stolen car, and naturally I'd have heard if a stray had been found."

"Stolen car?" Huskisson pricked up his ears and in turn assumed a slightly aggrieved look.

"Yes," Hawkins said, and added reassuringly. "No connection with this case. And anyhow the car's been found. Someone from London, I expect. The joy-riding habit is strong there, they tell me," and he smiled blandly at Huskisson.

The conversation became general and aimless, and five minutes or so later Major Dillon glanced at his watch and rose to his feet.

"Then that's all we can do at present," he observed. "Find the car; find the photographer. Get the Coroner to adjourn the inquest——"

"That's fixed, sir," the Superintendent interposed.

"Good. Then I'll——"

"We might keep a sharp look-out for anyone who knows this Anderson—or Smith," Huskisson in turn interrupted, and explained about the possibility that the dead man's trip had really been on business. "I'm not very sanguine," he added, "I'm afraid we can't do much, unless someone comes forward. And there's precious little chance of that until we announce the dead man's identity."

The other two agreed.

"Well then, I'll get a move on," Major Dillon announced, and took up his hat. "We might stroll down to the Grand together," he suggested to Huskisson, "I left my car there."

The Inspector politely offered him a lift and was rewarded not only by a word of thanks but also by that twitch of the eyebrow which had annoyed him at the beginning of the conference. Meanwhile the Superintendent had summoned the faithful Brewin and was about to instruct him to institute enquiries for the photographer.

" I'm taking you off that car business," he began.

" I've settled that, sir," the Sergeant replied, loudly, seizing the opportunity which the Major's presence gave to improve his own prospects of advancement.

Huskisson turned quickly.

" The Chrysler, d'you mean ? Or the stolen car ? "

Brewin looked rather bewildered, and Hawkins explained that the Sergeant knew nothing about the trivial incident of the " stolen " car. Then he adjured him to tell his story at once, enquiring sharply why he had not done so before.

" Only just got in, sir," Brewin replied aggrievedly. " Been over to Houghley Green to check up."

His three superiors listened intently whilst he related how it had been reported from Houghley Green that a Chrysler more or less corresponding to the one in question had arrived at the " Feathers " at about a quarter-past one. At any rate, it was a dusty-looking two-seater, with a London number.

" Girl driving ? " Huskisson asked sharply.

" No, sir," the Sergeant replied, and ignoring the Inspector's snort of annoyance, went on to state that the driver was a man. " But the girl with him answers the description given by Carter," he said. " Same clothes—and same small green case, which she took with her into the pub."

Huskisson regretted his premature snort.

" Go on," Major Dillon encouraged the Sergeant.

" The couple had lunch, sir, and drove off afterwards. They asked for the London road."

" Where's this Houghley Green ? " Huskisson asked the Superintendent.

" Quiet little place, about seven miles from here."

" Off the London road, I gather ? I certainly don't remember coming through it."

" Only a couple of miles out of the way," the Chief Constable put in, " very quiet place, as the Superintendent says. Don't suppose the 'Feathers'—is that the pub's name, d'you say ?—gets many Sunday lunchers."

" No, sir," said Brewin, boldly, " that's why they noticed the car, I reckon."

" I think I'd better run over there," Huskisson said, aloud, though mainly to himself. Brewin glanced at him indignantly. " There's this man, too."

" Landlord can't give much of a description, sir," the Sergeant retorted, and produced his pocket-book. It was manifest that he was determined to show that he had overlooked nothing. He turned the pages rapidly and read out in the monotonous tone of an official witness : " Age about forty, medium height and build, dark hair and moustache, dark complexion. Rather nervous-like. Dark brown suit, light overcoat, cloth cap."

" That's all they can say ? " Huskisson asked.

" Yes, sir." The tone was defiant.

" Then I don't suppose I need make the journey after all," the Inspector said, handsomely ; though inwardly he had no intention at all of abandoning it. Still, it was

no part of his policy to get up against the local men and he had not failed to recognise the Sergeant's annoyance or its cause.

" Good work, Sergeant." Major Dillon spoke rather loudly, as if to emphasise his own " local " feeling.

" Any news of where the man joined the car ? " the Superintendent asked, anxious to preserve a balance by refraining from adding his congratulations in Huskisson's presence.

" Er—no, sir," Brewin replied, reluctantly. " Like looking for a neddle in a haystack."

Huskisson coughed again, and the others looked at him, ready to resent any comment he might make on this.

" That's where a stranger can help, I daresay," he said, in so pleasant a tone that no opening was given for any resentment. " Assuming that both the girl and the man were strangers like myself, and that the man had to be picked up somewhere after the girl had collected the car—well, I should say there's one obvious place."

" Where's that ? "

" The Clock Tower."

" Clock Tower ! " the Chief Constable, to Brewin's joy, commented in a caustic tone, " why, it's the most public spot in the town."

" Just so," Huskisson replied imperturbably. " It's the easiest landmark, there's always a group of people there, waiting for trams or buses or cars, and one more wouldn't be noticed."

" I see," said Major Dillon, and the Superintendent nodded thoughtfully.

" You try, Sergeant," said Huskisson to Brewin. " You're pretty good at nosing things out. And if it's

any help, I should say the man was there at about half-past twelve and was carrying some kind of suit-case."

They looked at him in surprise, and he smiled contentedly.

CHAPTER XIV

A LONDON CONFERENCE

Inspector Augur had hurried from the Chief's room to his own to talk to Huskisson ; as soon as the conversation was over he hurried back again, to find that the Chief had himself extracted all the available news from the constable who had been enquiring into the late Mr. Anderson's acquaintance with Risquetti's Restaurant.

" Anything important ? " he asked of the Inspector.

" Huskisson's got a theory——"

" Then let it wait. No facts ? "

" Not obviously relevant."

" Then we'll consider those that we've got from the others. And to start with, so that you'll be *au courant* with the whole story, here's what those two constables have had to report. First of all, Anderson was pretty well known at Risquetti's ; lunched there fairly often and dined there occasionally. And a week or so ago he lunched there with what the head-waiter judged to be a ' better-class ' lady than usually accompanied him. I gather he wasn't—well, consistent. This ' better-class ' lady apparently showed it mostly in her clothes and her manner—' quietly dressed in something dark, and a refined voice and accent.' Apart from that " (the Chief shrugged his shoulders) " the usual make-up."

" Get a description of her, sir ? "

"No. Just that she was young, and fair-haired. Good-looking. The waiter who looked after their table thinks he'd recognise her again. Not a great deal—but something. Sounds to me as if it might quite likely be the bathing belle."

"Yes, sir," Augur agreed, dutifully if not very enthusiastically.

"Can't say the other report is much more substantial," the Chief continued. "It amounts to this, that a few minutes before I myself rang up Huskisson's flat yesterday—you know, he lives in Elder Place, just opposite Anderson's house—his landlady was chatting to a few of her bosom friends on the area steps, or so I gather. She, and one of her pals, has a vague recollection of someone coming out of a house opposite, almost certainly No. 17, getting into a car and driving off. Trouble is they aren't too sure about it all."

"But if so there must have been a car waiting outside the house, surely? Or do they mean it drove up?"

"Apparently they're sure it didn't drive up. So presumably it was standing there. I should think it very likely, and probably the reason why they didn't notice it is that there very often was a car standing there—as they admit. For that matter, I believe Huskisson keeps a car, and I daresay he leaves his——"

"By Jove, sir, his is a Chrysler too. And a two-seater."

The Chief smiled.

"Go slow. We don't know that the car which stood there on Sunday evening was a Chrysler at all. Just *a* car. Still I admit that if it *was* a Chrysler, that would make it all the more natural that they paid no particular attention to it. However, all we've got to go

on—and it's not too reliable—is that a man, or so they think, came out of the house, got into the car and drove away."

Inspector Augur made no comment.

"So we can start to put the pieces together," the Chief went on cheerfully, "and see whether a pattern begins to suggest itself."

He leant back in his chair, and folded his hands behind his head and rocked the chair gently to and fro.

"Anderson," he started. "A bank-clerk who's married a rich wife, of better social position than himself. A forger. The wife an invalid. They are separated and she pays him an allowance subject to good behaviour. Not a bad allowance, eh, but not enough for a man of his tastes. So evidently he supplements it however he can, and probably he has only got one scruple—not to lose his allowance. He's pretty careful and doesn't bring women to his house or anything; but evidently he's not so particular when he's at his office. And there's a distinct suggestion that his main business is blackmail."

He paused. "Agree to that, Augur, as a historical background?"

"Yes, sir, I think so."

"Good. Now let's take the events of the week-end. It's obvious he'd arranged with the girl to take her down to Prince's Bay. That may be all there is to it. I mean, the suggestion that it was a business trip may be just the usual bunkum. I should think it probably was. On the other hand, you might note one possible line of enquiry—is there a record of any trunk call, except the one to the Grand Hotel, to anyone in that neighbourhood, or even to any place which could be visited

conveniently on the way to or from Prince's Bay? Get that?"

"Yes, sir, but d'you think it's likely——"

"Why not? According to the clerk's story, it seems probable that Anderson did some of his blackmailing by telephone, doesn't it?"

"I see, sir. Quite so."

Inspector Augur was well acquainted with the Chief's little foibles and knew that he liked to have by him a not too unintelligent variety of "Dr. Watson."

"Very well," the Chief resumed. "We don't know yet whether he had any further reason for going down to this hotel for the week-end; but I think we can safely say the girl was part of the reason."

"Yes, sir. And Huskisson's idea——"

"No, let's have that afterwards," he was firmly interrupted. "Stick to the facts first."

Augur opened his mouth, with the intention of explaining that his colleague at Prince's Bay had reported some facts, but he thought better of it. Interruption is not welcome from your Watson. The Chief altered his attitude, and leant forward, his forearms on the broad blotter in front of him and his fingers gently drumming on the table-top.

"Second enquiry," he said, "we must try to find out when he started, and if possible the route he took. I mean, where did he pick up the girl? Not a very hopeful line, but we mustn't neglect it. Make a note, will you?"

The Inspector complied, a trifle ostentatiously.

"Then we come to Prince's Bay," the Chief continued, "and that, at present, is chiefly Huskisson's concern. Still, we know a certain amount—that the

couple got there somewhere about eleven o'clock, and went straight off to bathe before calling at the hotel. By the way, doesn't that strike you as odd? Yes, so it does me. What's your explanation?"

Augur had none to offer.

"I suggest," the other resumed complacently, "that the girl was responsible for that. You'll remember, the fellow at Risquetti's thought her a cut above Anderson's usual lady friend. Well, suppose she never had any intention of staying the week-end at the hotel? Wouldn't that explain why she didn't want to go and deposit her suit-case and so on?"

"By Jove, sir, so it would."

"You see, she'd obviously be anxious to get away easily and also not to attract attention. What's the trouble?" he broke off sharply, noticing a dubious look on Augur's face.

"Why, according to Huskisson, sir, she rather went out of her way to attract the notice of the man in charge of the car-park."

"So she did. Well, it's a secondary point. The chief thing would be a quick get-away."

The Inspector acquiesced.

"Anyhow, at about twelve-thirty"—the Chief returned to his summary—"the girl turned up, suit-case in hand, and drove off in the car. Since then she's not been seen apparently, though I rather wonder whether she hasn't been heard of."

"Huskisson says——" Augur again attempted to interrupt.

"And d'you know when she was heard of?" the other went on, ignoring the interruption. "Why, in that telephone message from this Godfrey whoever he is.

He leant back again, in his original and favourite attitude, and looked rather pleased with himself.

"Damned good, sir," Augur murmured. "It certainly might be so. I think I've something to corroborate that theory, sir."

"But, good lord, man, haven't you given me all the facts? How in the name of all that's holy am I to be expected——"

The Inspector hastily explained that Huskisson's last report contained a number of facts, some unchecked and others not necessarily connected with the case. In particular there was this queer business of the photographer.

"One thing's clearer than ever," the Chief concluded. "We shall have to look pretty closely into Mr. Godfrey and his telephone message, eh? No, not at once. Let's go on trying to put things in order and then consider our plan of campaign."

Augur made another note, and once more composed himself to listen.

"Now the next thing to consider seems to me to be that of the missing clothes. Anderson's, I mean. It seems clear the girl hadn't got them in her small case. What the deuce became of them? And why did they vanish? There seems to me to be three possibilities. First, just an ordinary theft, as you might say. Unlikely, I think. Singular coincidence, anyhow, for a man to have his clothes stolen casually, so to speak, just at the time when he was being murdered. Second, it was necessary to delay the establishment of the fellow's identity. That seemed the likeliest to start with, and I'm rather disposed still to keep it as a sort of working hypothesis. But now it seems to me there's a third

hypothesis : were the clothes stolen because they contained something—papers, say—which also were the motive for murder ? Or keys ? "

" Keys, sir. That's it."

" But even so, assuming there's anything in the story of the man coming out of Anderson's house on Sunday evening, how did the girl get the clothes and so on ? "

Inspector Augur nervously admitted that there too Huskisson's last report seemed likely to help. He gave the brief details.

" If it's a fact—and we can't be sure yet, sir," he went on, " that the girl didn't drive back alone, why shouldn't the man who came out of the house later that day be also the man who—well, let's say his job was to steal the keys."

" There's a bit of a snag, I fancy," the Chief said thoughtfully, whilst Augur was thankful that he omitted to comment upon the difference between " facts " and " theories." " Didn't the girl, when she got out of the car, say something about taking care of Anderson's valuables for him while he changed ? "

" Still," Augur ventured, " he might quite well have given her merely his watch and money. People often treat a safe key as of very little importance when they're at a distance from the safe."

The Chief nodded. " That, too, isn't a vital point," he admitted. " But I think we must take an active interest in this man. It certainly looks as if his job was to pinch the clothes just in case Anderson declined to trust the girl with the particular thing she wanted to get hold of."

Again there was a pause.

"And now where shall we look for this unknown man?" the Chief asked with a twinkle in his eye. "Easy, isn't it? It strikes me that Mr. Muirfield is just as interesting to us as Mr. Godfrey, eh?"

And Inspector Augur smiled a grim assent.

"Mind you," the other continued, "we shall have to go very gingerly. There's no evidence at all yet. Less in a way than against this Godfrey, whose own words pretty nearly suggest that he was at Prince's Bay on Sunday. And if it comes to that, there's almost as much evidence that Godfrey had a grievance against Anderson as that Muirfield had. Besides which," he added very thoughtfully, "I don't see why the murder was necessary, if they could get the keys without it; and it certainly looks as if they'd done that before the murder took place. Work it out, man," he concluded, as the Inspector once more took on a puzzled air. Then his face brightened again.

"What about the car, sir?" he suggested. "That might connect up whoever's in possession of it with the case."

The Chief Inspector laughed outright.

"That's the Police, I'm afraid," he said. "Yes, the car was found abandoned the other side of Hyde Park, late on Sunday night, and still there next morning. Sorry I didn't tell you," he added, apologetically, "but that was so obviously what they'd do with the car—I mean, just abandon it somewhere. And as I also expected, there's apparently nothing in the car that's going to help us now that it *has* been found."

"Seen her yourself, sir?"

"Who?"

"The car."

" Oh, the car. Yes. You can take it as certain—nothing to help us there."

" Suit-cases, sir ? "

" Anderson's. An inventory's being made, though I don't really know what we're to hope for from that. At all events, apart from Huskisson's efforts to discover how the job was done on the sands, in the blazing sunshine, the two obvious lines for us are Godfrey and Muirfield. I think you'd better see them both yourself, assuming we can get in touch with them, of course."

Augur coughed.

" Dimsdale and Overbury are on the job, sir," he said. " I warned 'em we only wanted to know who and what the two persons are ; and that they weren't to go talking to 'em or putting questions."

" Good. The third obvious enquiry is into the contents of the two safes. The office one is locked, isn't it ? I think we'll have to break into it. As for the one in the house—damme, what did Porritt do about it ? "

The Chief rang a bell, and summoned the Sergeant.

" No, sir, touched nothing," that worthy reported, " beyond opening the safe. Thought you or the Inspector would want to go through the papers yourself."

" I see. Still "—and the Chief Inspector glanced at Augur—" I don't much care for leaving the papers in an open safe. Sergeant, I think you'd better get back to Elder Place and bring those papers along here."

Sergeant Porritt reddened under the implied rebuke and departed hastily to carry out his instructions. The other two continued to discuss details of the moves to be made next.

"By the way, sir," Augur enquired a few minutes later, "you still want the inquest adjourned?"

"I think it's best. On the other hand, as you tactfully refrain from saying, Inspector, there's the question of identification."

He reflected, and then said with a smile:

"How would it be to get the servants—or at least the cook and the valet—and also the clerk down to Prince's Bay to-morrow *after* the inquest? What time is it? Ten. Then that would do admirably. That'll keep them out of the way here, and also it'll make it easy to keep an eye on them."

The Inspector was rather startled by the concluding words, and enquired whether the Chief was doubtful about the stories told by Mr. Anderson's employees.

"The valet—Crowther, yes," the Chief replied, thoughtfully. "Don't forget he was paid as a kind of spy by Mrs. Anderson. The chances are that, with encouragement of that kind, he got to know a good deal, aren't they? Certainly a good deal more than he told Mrs. Anderson."

"You mean the lunches at Risquetti's and so on? D'you suppose he knew about the way Anderson spent his working day?"

"I should guess it's highly probable. And from Porritt's report it seems even more probable that he knows more about this Godfrey than he's told us yet."

There was a brief silence.

"I'll have a word with Crowther—here—when he's back from Prince's Bay to-morrow evening," he said slowly.

Inspector Augur's smile would probably have given Crowther a sleepless night if he had seen it.

" Shall I fix that now ? " he suggested.

The Chief Inspector nodded.

" Ring up the house and talk to Porritt," he said. " He ought to be nearly there by now. All he need do is to warn the servants that a plain-clothes man will call to take them down in the morning. Tell him to put it nicely. I don't want them frightened. Then get on with the other business."

Inspector Augur retired, somewhat disposed to grumble because the Chief seemed to expect him to do everything. " All very fine to sit there and give orders," he thought to himself. Meanwhile the subject of his thoughts reflected no less gloomily that life was just one thing after another ; he'd better go and see the Assistant Commissioner about that awkward case of the ex-Cabinet Minister. . . .

CHAPTER XV

A PACKET OF PAPERS

When Inspector Augur rang up 17 Elder Place he was answered by Crowther, who said that Sergeant Porritt had not yet arrived.

"Anything fresh 'appened?" the little man enquired, a note of anxiety in his voice.

"Oh no," the Inspector answered reassuringly, "but you might ask him not to leave again till I've spoken to him," and, giving his name, he rang off.

He spent the interval before he telephoned again in glancing at the inventory of the contents of the suitcase found in the deserted car. He remembered that Constable Davis had made out a list of the articles which, according to Crowther, Anderson had taken away for the week-end, and he sent for the constable and told him to go through the two lists and compare them.

Meanwhile Sergeant Porritt had reached the house and had been admitted by Crowther, almost with servility. He displayed a vast anxiety to assist and seemed quite disappointed when he learnt that the Sergeant's purpose was merely to take away the papers in the safe. Porritt majestically produced the confiscated key of the study and ordering Crowther to stay at hand in the hall, started to work carefully to lift the contents of the safe on to the floor, preparatory

to packing them in the case which he had brought for the purpose. In addition to a number of smallish packets of documents and one or two fat but not very large envelopes, there were several heavy books or ledgers. He put the lighter packets on one side, intending to pack the heavier articles lowermost. Half a dozen of the envelopes, he noticed without much interest, bore initials and a date followed by a dash ; the others also bore initials, but the dash had become a hyphen joining two dates.

He had hardly started the packing-up process when the telephone bell rang. As Crowther had given him Inspector Augur's message, he knew what to expect and hurried out into the hall. The valet, however, was before him and performed the task of handing over the receiver in a ceremonial manner.

" Porritt here, sir."

At the other end of the wire he heard Augur's voice conveying the instructions about Crowther and the cook going down to identify the body ; he was conscious that Crowther himself was hovering a yard or so behind him, deeply interested in the conversation. When Augur began to ask Porritt how he thought Crowther would take it, his present attitude and so on, the Sergeant, swearing silently, asked him to hold on a minute, put his hand over the mouthpiece and, turning sharply on the valet, told him to get along out of it.

" What ! Out of the 'ouse ? " he asked, in hurt and plaintive tones.

" No. Of course not. But don't breathe down the back of me neck, or I can't hear what the Inspector's saying."

Crowther's menacing eye suggested an inclination to argue the accusation on its accurate meaning, but he thought better of it, nodded understandingly, and tiptoed down the hall with exaggerated caution, towards the study.

The Sergeant turned back to the telephone and explained apologetically to the Inspector that he had not been alone and had had difficulty in applying himself to the conversation—that, at all events, was the general tenor of his statement. Then he listened carefully both to instructions and questions, and in reply to the latter said that he did not think there would be any trouble. The man seemed ready enough to help, and he, Porritt, certainly wouldn't frighten him.

He replaced the receiver and looked round. Crowther had disappeared. The Sergeant swore again, this time aloud, and returned quickly to the study. He felt inclined to tell the valet off for daring to enter the room but reflected that it was his own fault for not stopping him. He was further softened by the sight of the little man sitting at the writing-desk, the picture of worry.

" Hullo, what's up ? " he enquired in a kindly tone, adding, as a salve to his own conscience, that Crowther " didn't ought to have come in without permission."

" Sorry, I'm shore," Crowther replied, with the pertness to which Porritt was accustomed but which might, he felt, be a mask for his anxiety. " First I'm to 'ang about the 'all and then I'm to 'old me breath as long as I stay there and then——" He jerked his head. " Wot a life," he concluded.

" That's all right," the Sergeant smiled. " And now look here," and he proceeded to outline the arrangements for the following day.

"Just a matter of identifying," he explained. "Can't get you there for the inquest, so probably it'll be adjourned."

Mr. Crowther coughed and regarded the policeman dubiously.

"Mean to say that me and Sarah goes down be train, under escort like?"

Porritt smiled.

"Not escort in that sense," he said. "Of course you're a free agent, in a manner of speaking."

Crowther sniffed, and faintly echoed the words "manner of speaking." "And who pays?" he demanded.

"Don't you worry about that," he was assured. "That's where the escort comes in useful."

"Well, so long as it's understood I go of me own accord, to be 'elpful, and provided the escort don't take us by excursion train——"

Finally he departed to communicate the news to Sarah.

"What about Elsie comin' along too and makin' it a family party? I expect she'n Sarah'll be glad of a breath of sea-air," was the final suggestion, rejected by the Sergeant on the grounds of the financial difficulties of the British Empire and the need for someone to stay at 17 Elder Place.

As soon as he was alone, the Sergeant hurriedly resumed the packing of the documents. They took up more room than he had expected, and he had some difficulty to pack them all in; and he had gathered from his brief interview with the Chief Inspector that no time was to be wasted in conveying them to the Yard.

intimate character, but written to and by whom was uncertain. Augur glanced through them very hurriedly ; in two cases, out of the five packets, he found letters signed with initials, but rather to his surprise he could find none to correspond in the ledger. Finally he tied up the packets again ; clearly a very thorough examination would be needed, and a great searching out of addresses.

Lastly he came to the envelopes, and like Sergeant Porritt he was struck by the difference in their marking. He made a kind of " sample comparison " and quickly realised what the difference was. Those which were marked with two dates contained rough copies of correspondence and slips of paper on which sums of money were written ; all these were clipped together and uppermost of all was a slip with the word " Settled," and a date corresponding with the second of the two shown on the outside of the envelope.

On the other hand, there were the five envelopes on which only one date was written. These contained originals of letters, instead of copies, and the " Settled " slip was missing. In other words, these were the sources of present income—the victims whom Anderson was blackmailing up to the time of his death ; the other category of envelopes were cases which he had milked dry ; and the packets of letters tied with tape were his prospective prey.

Well, all this would have to be examined thoroughly ; for the moment, Augur contented himself with noting the names and addresses of the " current cases " and he exclaimed aloud when he found that one of them was a Sir Henry Godfrey, with an address in Herefordshire. It might, of course, be a coincidence, but——

about ten minutes past eight and had started almost at once. Yes, he had carried a suit-case with him, and furthermore he had given instructions in person overnight that the car was to be all ready at that time. No one in the garage had any idea what direction he had taken, as was but natural.

With that he returned to the Yard and carried his caseful of papers rather importantly to Inspector Augur. He was bidden to leave them, case and all, on a table by the window, and then to make the final arrangements about the escort ; also to notify Inspector Huskisson or Superintendent Hawkins of the programme. " Oh, and you'd better go and see the clerk—Pepper's his name, I think—and tell him he'll be escorted down too. Get a key of the office from him."

The Inspector rather impatiently added a few words of explanation and the clerk's address.

" Sergeant Overbury saw him this afternoon," he added finally. " Don't ask him any questions. Just tell him he's needed to identify. But keep your eyes open."

When the Sergeant had departed Augur opened the case and groaned at the sight of its contents. It was going to be a pretty job to go through that lot, especially with the Chief insisting on hustle. He emptied the case on to the table, and noticed that there was a certain amount of symmetry (so to speak) in the papers. He arranged the three main categories in three separate heaps—the account books, the packets of papers tied in tape, and the envelopes. He supposed he had better have a go at the stuff himself first, if only to judge whether expert examination was necessary.

He was interrupted by the appearance of Davis, who

reported that he had completed the comparison of the two lists.

"I've ticked off in blue pencil, sir," he said, "on the list which the man Crowther provided, the article which was on the other list supplied by you, sir."

"I see," said Augur, and though he attached little importance to the affair he made a show of examining the paper carefully. As he did so, his eyes opened wide in surprise.

"D'you mean to say——" he began and stopped short.

"Sir?"

"This list here," the Inspector began again, more rationally, "is the list of everything Anderson took away with him, including what he was wearing?"

"Yes, sir. So far as Crowther could remember, or knew. The articles he was wearing come on top of the list, sir."

"Then you mean to say that this list I gave you contained all the things he was wearing—including watch and pocket-book—as well as what he had in the suit-case?"

"Yes, sir. And one or two more items. No doubt Crowther forgot some. Two items only missing, sir."

Augur suddenly realised that the constable did not know what the other list was. He briefly explained.

"So you see," he said, "everything he'd got on when he started came back in the suit-case, except bathing-dress and a towel."

Naturally the man failed to recognise the interest of this. He was dismissed with a word of thanks.

"That settles that," said Augur to himself. "Now we know that either the girl or whoever was 'in it'

with her was responsible for stealing the clothes. Or making off with them, anyhow. That disposes of one of the Chief's theories."

He pondered again.

"Wonder what's become of the towel," he said; but then he was not acquainted with Prince's Bay. "I'll tell Huskisson to-morrow to get on to that."

He put away the list and returned to the contents of the safe.

A very brief examination sufficed to show that he had here the working capital, so to speak, of a big-scale blackmailer. The account books, it is true, were surprisingly discreet. They mentioned no names, so that it was impossible from them alone to tell what amounts came from which individual sources; but they used initials which corresponded with those on the envelopes. A number of other items also appeared in the accounts, mostly of a cryptic character. Doubtless those were transactions such as the "Muirfield" one which Mr. Pepper had plainly hinted at.

Inspector Augur whistled softly as he saw the size of the figures. Mr. Anderson evidently had prospered and grown rich. Another of the books contained what was clearly a list of his investments, and Augur noticed that here the dead man had clearly played for safety. It almost seemed as if he had been laying up for a rainy day—such, perhaps, as the cessation of his wife's allowance. A third book dealt with disbursements and was equally discreet; here, no doubt, were the accounts of his purchases. "Buy cheap and sell dear" had certainly been his slogan.

He turned to the bundles of papers tied in tape; they appeared to consist of private letters of an

intimate character, but written to and by whom was uncertain. Augur glanced through them very hurriedly ; in two cases, out of the five packets, he found letters signed with initials, but rather to his surprise he could find none to correspond in the ledger. Finally he tied up the packets again ; clearly a very thorough examination would be needed, and a great searching out of addresses.

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Well, all this would have to be examined thoroughly ; for the moment, Augur contented himself with noting the names and addresses of the " current cases " and he exclaimed aloud when he found that one of them was a Sir Henry Godfrey, with an address in Herefordshire. It might, of course, be a coincidence, but——

Then he noticed something else, that the interval between the dates shown on the " closed " cases was comparatively short. Quickly he referred to the account of receipts, and made sure of his ground. Mr. Anderson evidently had been cautious and careful, even in blackmail. His plan evidently was to keep his price moderate, and to refrain from driving his victims to desperate measures. To balance this, he made methodical arrangements for a steady supply of victims.

Finally, Augur jotted down a list of the initials shown in the account book as having paid over sums during the past two or three years. He ignored for the moment other entries than initials—there were the names of one or two racehorses, outsiders who had won at long odds, so far as the Inspector remembered, and there were phrases which clearly related to " business deals," legitimate or otherwise, but probably not blackmail. He compared the results of this search with the list of initials on the envelopes, and found that apart from one particular it tallied. There was one set of initials " C. G. T." which figured three or four times in the account book, over the past three years, but which corresponded with none of the envelopes. There was, however, a much more striking " gap " ; there was no sign of any plans or papers of a new kind of wireless gadget.

The Inspector hurried to report to the Chief, anxious to catch him before he went off duty. He ought to be pleased with the haul—and with himself, for having run no risks with that unlocked safe.

He was quite aggrieved to discover that the Chief's room was empty and its owner closeted with the Assistant Commissioner.

CHAPTER XVI

INDEPENDENCE OF THE VALET

He had to kick his heels impatiently for nearly twenty minutes before the Chief returned. He failed to notice the conscious effort with which his superior tore his thoughts, from the case which he had just been talking about, to the one with which Augur was concerned, and into which the two men promptly plunged.

At the end of Augur's recital, the other nodded gravely two or three times.

" Good," he said. " That opens out lots of straightforward routine enquiries, doesn't it, and at the same time gives us some nice little hints for our immediate future. Put 'em on the books, Augur, at once, and the local people can give us preliminary reports on the people who figure there, as far as they can be identified straight off. Let Records see the names, too. This obviously is blackmail, and they may be able to give us a hint."

" To-night, sir ? " Augur enquired ; the faint note of protest struck no responsive chord.

" Yes, get 'em all started to-night. The sooner they get down to it to-morrow, the better. Time's slipping by. We've hardly made a start yet."

With this verdict the Inspector would have liked to disagree, but he felt it would be impolitic ; with

rather ostentatious to-do he prepared to depart to his room. The Chief checked him.

"All O.K. about the inquest and the identification?"

"Yes, sir. At least so far as Crowther is concerned—that is the servant. And word's been sent to Prince's Bay. And I ought to hear any minute that the clerk's been warned."

Again his departure was delayed.

"This name of Godfrey," the Chief observed thoughtfully. "Has that call been traced?"

Augur reddened. How like one's superiors to overlook all the mass of work one has done and put an unerring finger on a weak spot.

"Nothing through from the Telephone Service."

"Then hustle them. Remind them that we're not the general public. And don't let them tell us the line's out of order or any of that bunk."

He spoke feelingly, since even a Chief Inspector for part of his time lives—and suffers—as a member of the general public.

"Very good, sir," said Augur, chafing at his retention.

"I think you'd better detail a man to keep an eye on Godfrey when he is found; and also on this Muirfield. Mind, I don't want them approached directly. That's for to-morrow, first thing."

He paused for so long that the Inspector again made a tentative movement towards the door.

"I don't want to bring Huskisson back yet," the other resumed inexorably, "though it would be a good thing to put him on to the case from a fresh angle. On the other hand, these two interviews may be ticklish

ones. I think you'd better take them on yourself, Augur : first thing, see ? If you think there's anything in it, you'd better bring them along here—gently, of course. And don't forget—I'll see Crowther when he's back from Prince's Bay."

There was another silence.

" Get a move on, man," the Chief Inspector said, suddenly and sharply, and Augur departed with a renewed sense of injustice. Fortunately he did not see in the other's eye the twinkle which betokened that once more he had used his habitual device to stir the rather complacent Inspector to energetic action.

The twinkle was justified ; for as the shadows darkened the Embankment, Augur gave a brilliant display of administrative pyrotechnics, and put in train all the enquiries entrusted to him.

The London Telephone Service was slightly aggrieved at the attempt to hustle its dignified procedure, but under pressure admitted that the call had been traced. It was from a house on the outskirts of London, in Kent, and occupied by a Mr. C. T. Godfrey. As Mr. Muirfield's address—assuming that he was the one and only mechanical engineer of that name in the Telephone Directory—had also been established, the arrangements for supervision were simple enough. And finally, with a series of messages to local police, asking for confidential reports about the people on the blackmailer's list, the Inspector's day ended, and he departed homewards feeling, like his Chief, that a good day's work had been accomplished.

Administrative energy has its faults as well as its merits ; the spur which the Chief had applied had, perhaps, been a shade too effective. At any rate,

Augur had hardly impressed the need for discretion upon the local police as he ought to have done, especially in the case of the knight of Herefordshire.

Inspector and Chief Inspector alike were still sleeping the sleep of the just—or at any rate had hardly roused themselves from it—when Mr. Crowther embarked upon a proceeding which did not figure in the official programme and which he was to regret very bitterly, but too late.

He set out upon his motor-bicycle for Prince's Bay. He allowed plenty of time, since he had a distrust, based upon sad experience, of the reliability of a time-schedule when it depended upon the ancient machine. His sister was by no means happy about his departure, but was convinced by his superior knowledge of the official world.

" Stands to reason, don't it ? " he urged in a tone of exasperation, " that so long as I'm there, the P'lice is satisfied. And seein' that they've got to buy two tickets, one fer you and one fer me, there's no 'arm in Elsie usin' me ticket instead. Now I ask you."

Sarah bowed before this matter-of-fact presentation of the case, though her doubts were not wholly removed.

" Why d'you want to go on the bike ? " she enquired, as if no man in his senses would deliberately choose such a course ; perhaps a reasonable view enough.

" Cos I like a spin of a fine day," he replied calmly.

" Not got nothin' on, like ? " she suggested, with an insinuating air.

" Me ? Don't be a fool, Sarah. Can't you get it into your fat 'ead that I likes to go by bike ? And, what's more, it'll be a treat for Elsie. You said so yourself."

His tone was such that Sarah showed no resentment

at his remarks. She merely murmured that " it wasn't exactly a treat for sore eyes to see the master in 'is coffin." At which Mr. Crowther snorted and said that some people liked to take their pleasures sadly.

" What is it, after all ? Couple of minutes lookin' at the old boy. I'll be there and see him first, and if it's 'im, as it is for dead certain, I'll drop you the 'int, and you and Elsie can keep your eyes shut all the time if you like. And then you can pop off and paint the town red."

A few minutes later he set out, to the accompaniment of a series of terrific explosions, on his adventurous ride, and was well on his way when a constable in plain clothes presented himself to escort the identifying parties to the station. The cook found that the escort was much less easily persuaded than she had been ; he was, in fact, a good deal perturbed, and at the risk of missing the train insisted upon telephoning for instructions before he accepted Elsie as substitute for Crowther.

The blasphemy which Mr. Crowther's explosive departure had, it is to be feared, produced in the dignified quiet of Elder Place found a late echo in Scotland Yard. But it was too late to do anything but accept the programme as revised by the servant, and in due course Elsie and Sarah in two corners of a third-class carriage were gazing at the backs of suburban residences, whilst in a third corner Mr. Pepper kept himself to himself and marked his social superiority over all his companions by immersing himself in *The Times*—a paper which normally he avoided like the plague. Fourthly the plain-clothes man, upset by the failure of the man-servant to carry out his instructions, watched his

charges suspiciously, as if, like Charles Peace of unhallowed memory, they might, at any moment, singly or collectively hurl themselves out of the windows.

Whilst these humble dependants of the deceased blackmailer were converging on the scene of his murder, Inspector Huskisson and Sergeant Brewin were occupying busily enough the time before the inquest opened. If truth be told, the former had overnight carried out his secret intention to visit that inn at Houghley Green to try and get further details of the couple in the Chrysler who had lunched there on Sunday. He had failed to do so, which at least put him in an agreeable frame of mind so far as Brewin was concerned ; he had been inclined to doubt the Sergeant's sagacity and thoroughness. In the morning therefore he greeted him most amiably, and expressed no surprise or scepticism when he confessed that his effort to trace the " man with the suit-case " had met with very little success.

" I talked to a couple of the regular char-à-banc conductors," he reported, " who were standing waiting by the Clock Tower between half-past twelve and a quarter to one on Sunday, but they can't swear positively to having seen the man. One of 'em rather fancies he saw what may have been the fellow, but he didn't notice him specially. Lots of people wait there with attaché cases and the like, waiting for their bus."

" Of course," Huskisson agreed. " It was just an offchance. And of course there was the chance they'd notice the car."

" That's it," Brewin answered. " That's what makes this fellow think he saw the man. He kind of remembers a car stopping and a man getting in. But there's more

amusing things to look at of a Sunday," he concluded with a smile.

" Well, we can't build on it. And it's not vitally important, perhaps. I don't think we can hope to trace the man that way. But if we *can* lay hands on him, and the girl, we may be able to find people who can identify them—have to broadcast an appeal. And of course there's the man who keeps the pub where they lunched. Still, we'd better go on trying," he ended, not very confidently ; later he was to blame Inspector Augur, not unjustly, for failing to save him and Brewin some useless work, through his failure to relate the details of the progress accomplished in London.

" I say, Inspector," the Sergeant asked in a properly subdued tone, " what's the idea about the suit-case that you say the man was carrying ? "

" Oh, that. Anderson's clothes, of course," Huskisson replied. " My idea is that he pinched 'em out of the changing-room, probably while the girl was dressing next door."

" I see. Of course." Brewin sounded ashamed of his failure to see this for himself.

" Well, we'll have to look elsewhere," Huskisson continued, a little sharply.

" At the dressing-rooms ? "

" And the station. If this man really was in the business with the girl, as looks pretty certain, and went back with her by car, I should say he certainly came down by train. Either Saturday night or Sunday morning. Can you cover the station ? Good. And let me know what the Sunday trains from town are. Oh yes, after the inquest. That shouldn't take long."

In this estimate at least the Inspector was right. The

witnesses, who included the deck-chair man, the bathers and the old Jewish visitor, were not allowed to say nearly as much as they had hoped. In fact, the bathing belle was the only one who got a " decent show " at all, as she put it. She was asked in all gravity whether she thought that the dead man's companion could have any weapon concealed about her.

She giggled at the question.

" What, one of them syringes ? " she asked in reply, and after the red herring thus introduced had been disposed of, explained that she had forgotten the words she wanted ; but she meant " one of them syringes they stick under your skin," for in her opinion " the girl would've had to have the weapon under her skin if she had it anywhere, considering the costume she was wearing."

The same question was put in due course to the elderly Jew, but with his wife's eye upon him he refused to admit that he had taken a particular interest in the unknown lady's figure.

True to his word the Coroner adjourned the inquest as soon as he could decently do so. The audience which, despite the lure of the sea and the sunshine, was a large one, departed in great disappointment. The Chief Constable, with the Superintendent and the Inspector, waited behind to thank the Coroner, and Huskisson took the opportunity to impress upon the two reporters who were present that the discovery of the dead man's identity was the first necessity.

" What about your witnesses to the identification, Superintendent ? " Major Dillon enquired when the Fourth Estate had withdrawn. The Coroner looked his question ; the Chief Constable briefly and tactfully

explained, though the explanation was not too well received.

The Superintendent thought that they would hardly have had time to arrive from the train at the Police Station ; but he would just telephone . . .

He returned and looked rather reproachfully at Huskisson.

" You didn't tell me there was a change of plan," he remarked.

The other looked quite blank.

" Never heard there was one," he said.

" One of the witnesses—the valet—apparently didn't come by train but on a motor-bicycle. He got to the Station about ten minutes ago. The others aren't there yet."

Huskisson protested his entire ignorance.

" Well, it really doesn't matter, does it ? " the Chief Constable interposed. " I suggest that the Superintendent runs down by car to the Station and fetches the lot of them along as soon as they all turn up. Send the valet along first, if you like."

Huskisson had nothing particular to discuss with the Chief Constable, and after the Coroner and the Superintendent had both departed they talked of indifferent subjects until the tedium was relieved by the appearance of Crowther and a constable.

It was a matter of a few minutes for him to declare formally that he identified the dead man as his employer, William Anderson. He was cut short in his attempt to make a funeral oration.

" Well, that's all you want of me, is it ? " he asked in some disgust. " And me come all this way—well, suppose I can just buzz off again."

He stated, not too accurately, that no objection had been raised to his independent travel ; and he further made it plain that the London police and he were on the friendliest terms, " for ever droppin' in for a chat." So there seemed no reason why he should not return as he had come. He delayed his departure from the Police Station long enough to have a word with his sister and the housemaid, but not long enough to arrange a rendezvous with them.

" Catch me spendin' me time and money trottin' them two round the side-shows," he murmured to himself, as a fresh series of explosions heralded his entrance upon a new stage on his day's outing.

It is improbable that either Sarah or Elsie followed the valet's advice and identified Mr. Anderson with their eyes shut. Here was an event which they would want to describe with gusto for many a day.

" It's 'im right enough," was Sarah's comment ; Elsie did her best to introduce a note of hysterical sympathy into her recognition of the dead body.

Mr. Pepper, though painfully nervous, was as obviously certain of the identity. His statement to that effect nicely blended annoyance with satisfaction—annoyance because he was out of a job, and satisfaction because he had patently had little liking for his late employer.

The party adjourned to the Police Station for final formalities. There Huskisson was informed that Inspector Augur was waiting to speak to him on the telephone.

" I wish you'd keep an eye on that tiresome little brute, Crowther," said Augur, and explained the circumstances of the valet's departure from London.

" Bit late in the day, old son," retorted HHH, and

his brief recital of Crowther's appearance and departure was interrupted and punctuated by a series of oaths.

"Don't blame me," said HHH, sharply.

"No, of course not. Not your fault. They didn't tell me here till a couple of minutes ago."

"Don't worry. I've no doubt he means to go back the way he came," the other Inspector assured him consolingly. "Anyhow, we'll ship your other witnesses back labelled 'with care.'"

Sarah and Elsie were sadly disappointed—to put it mildly—when their vision of a day by the seaside was rudely shattered; Mr. Pepper, whose mantle of refinement had been growing more and more voluminous, seemed rather relieved that they were to return by the next train.

Huskisson with some amusement told Superintendent Hawkins of the flutter which Crowther had caused at Scotland Yard.

"Fact of the matter is, he's hurt their dignity," Hawkins suggested with a smile, and agreed that it really did not seem to matter much.

Here they were both wrong; Inspector Augur's anxiety, if weakly founded, was justified by the event; for Mr. Crowther never appeared again at No. 17 Elder Place.

CHAPTER XVII

INTERVIEW WITH AN AUTHOR

That Inspector Augur appeared rather late at the Yard was not due to his having overslept or to any inattention to duty. On the contrary, he had already paid an early morning call, accompanied by the indefatigable Sergeant Dimsdale ; and where two had set out, three had returned, the third being Mr. Claude Godfrey.

The " house in Kent " from which the mysterious trunk call had been made had proved to be a couple of workmen's cottages pleasantly converted into a small residence " in the heart of the country yet within easy reach of London " ; the sort of place which an indifferent railway service had left in perfect seclusion, but which the epidemic of char-à-bancs threatened with submersion in suburbia. Augur nodded to the plain-clothes man, who, in the guise of a hedger, was occupied in keeping an eye on it.

Leaving their car and the driver in the gravel space in front of the house (it could hardly be called a drive), the Inspector enquired for Mr. Godfrey and was promptly informed that he was at work and could not be disturbed. The old woman who appeared to be the entire staff further explained that he was a " writing gentleman." Her orders evidently were strict, and despite veiled menaces and the display of warrant cards

and the like she stoutly declined to lead the way to her employer's retreat.

The altercation was interrupted by the appearance of a head from an open window beside the front door—a somewhat tousled head of wiry, brown hair ; a sunburnt, rather unshaven face, in which twinkled eyes of a startling blue—twinkled either in anger or amusement.

" What the hell's all this, Mrs. East ? "

" Oh, Mr. Godfrey, sir, it's the Police. Want to see you, they do, and I was just telling them as how you wasn't to be disturbed."

" Well, they've seen me now, and I have been disturbed," the man began.

" Beg pardon, sir," Inspector Augur spoke in placatory tones.

" Why should I ? " the other interrupted, and then to the old lady, " All right, Mrs. East—show 'em in."

" I'm sure I'm very sorry, sir——"

" Not your fault." And the head disappeared again.

Mrs. East admitted Augur and Dimsdale into a pleasant, stone-floored hall, which evidently served also as a dining-room. Its chief features were a large refectory table, from which the remains of breakfast had yet to be cleared away, an open fireplace, a couple of bookcases and an enormous, untidy pile of books on the floor in one corner. She opened a door on the left, and they entered what clearly was the main room of the house. It ran from front to back and had windows at each end ; and at the back had evidently been built out into a large bay. The latter consisted of French windows, two of which now stood open. Outside lay a bright, orderly garden, full of colour and sunshine ;

inside considerable chaos reigned. Books and papers seemed to be everywhere, mixed with implements of sport. In front of the bay-windows was a handsome, flat-topped writing-desk, and beside it a smaller one with a typewriter on it. The floor about these tables was strewn with sheets of paper.

Mr. Godfrey was in grey flannels and shirt-sleeves ; he was smoking a large briar pipe and standing on the stone kerb in front of the large empty grate.

" Come in and shut the door," he said coldly but not unpleasantly, " and then perhaps you'll explain what you want."

They complied with the first part of the request.

" I'm Inspector Augur, sir, of New Scotland Yard."

Mr. Godfrey bowed politely.

" And your friend ? " he said enquiringly.

" Sergeant Dimsdale," Augur replied, reddening.

Mr. Godfrey bowed again.

" And you, I think, are Mr. Claude Godfrey."

" Pleased to have you know me."

There was a silence.

" Does one ask the Police to take a chair ? " Mr. Godfrey asked of the ceiling. " These problems of etiquette are so distracting." Before the Inspector could say anything, he went on abruptly, " Are you making a long stay ? "

" I've called to see you about a telephone message you sent to Mr. William Anderson," Augur replied, not very directly.

Mr. Godfrey stepped briskly forward, scooped a number of books and papers out of one of the leather arm-chairs and begged the Inspector to be seated. " Clear another for yourself, won't you ? " he invited

the Sergeant, and then flung himself down into the only chair which was apparently in regular use as a seat. Inspector Augur accepted the offer, but Sergeant Dimsdale modestly moved towards the window and remained standing. Mr. Godfrey, observing this, frowned somewhat and caressed his stubbly chin with a lean brown hand.

"Start again at the beginning," he demanded, and Augur repeated his sentence.

"You say you're from Scotland Yard?" the other enquired. The Inspector again produced his warrant card, and handed it over. Mr. Godfrey examined it closely and sighed.

"Have to take you on trust," he said. "Such is liberty. If a man produces a printed card to say he's from the Water Board or the Gas Company, I have to let him in and allow him to make an inventory of my best electro-plate. Whereas when I go to my bank——" And he ended with a shrug of his shoulders.

"It's perfectly all right, sir," Augur assured him with a smile, and put out his hand for his card. Mr. Godfrey returned it with some reluctance. The Inspector's smile hardened.

"You seem very suspicious, Mr. Godfrey."

"Well, I gather you've come on behalf of Mr. Anderson, you know."

"Oh, is that a reason——"

"Come now, between ourselves—and without prejudice and *sub rosa* and so forth—wouldn't you be a bit suspicious of the emissaries (just the word I wanted) of a blackmailer?"

"Blackmailer! Have you any evidence——"

"No you don't," the "writing gentleman" cut him

short. " I don't want to be run in for libel or slander or anything. Let's hear why you've come to see me."

" I've told you, sir. Your telephone message."

" Well, what about it ? "

" Perhaps you'll explain what you meant by it ? "

" Why the devil should I ? Doesn't Mr. Anderson know ? "

The Inspector hesitated.

" Of course he does," Mr. Godfrey insisted. " Or, if he doesn't, he'll jolly soon find out if he tries any more of his little games."

Augur's hesitation had been as to how much he should reveal. But unless this Claude Godfrey was a first-class actor, he was ignorant of Sunday's tragedy. He would risk it.

" Mr. William Anderson is dead," he announced curtly.

" Good," said Mr. Godfrey, promptly and without turning a hair. " Then you needn't give him my message."

The Inspector's gaze narrowed.

" There is reason to suppose that he was murdered," he resumed.

" It certainly wouldn't surprise me." The other remained unperturbed.

" At Prince's Bay, on Sunday," the Inspector fired another broadside, and this time it took effect. For a second the writer positively gaped at him, his pipe held suspended in mid-air, half-way to his lips. Then he quickly recovered himself.

" Just the sort of place he *would* choose," he observed, calmly, yet the Inspector was conscious of a new tension in the conversation. He noticed, too, that a quick,

covert glance was flung in the direction of Sergeant Dimsdale, who was now standing close to the bay-window, beside a small table covered, like everything else, with a miscellaneous litter. Apparently the Sergeant also was aware of the change in the atmosphere, for he moved back towards the fireplace. And at this Mr. Godfrey's face perceptibly brightened ; now why ?

" So you see that your message is important," the Inspector suggested.

" Can't say I do. Let me see—why, yes ; Anderson must have been dead when I rang him up."

He rose to his feet, with an air of finality, as if this disposed of the matter. The Inspector rose, too, but with no intention of closing the interview.

" We are anxious to learn all we can about Mr. Anderson," he said, " and from your message and from what you've said to me this morning I gather you—know something."

" What, I ? Good Lord, no. I've never even met him."

" Not for want of trying," Augur interrupted, meaningly.

" What's the idea ? "

The Inspector explained that the police were aware of Mr. Godfrey's calls at Elder Place and the refusal of Mr. Anderson to admit him. The writer was silent and thoughtful.

" Come now, sir," Augur resumed. " Why d'you call him a blackmailer ? Obviously because——"

" Nonsense. I've never been blackmailed—I'd like to see anyone try it. Not that they'd have any opportunity."

Augur smiled.

" Oh no, sir. Not you. Your—uncle, isn't it? "

Mr. Godfrey started, and the bright blue of his eyes turned in a flash from good humour to anger.

" What the devil——" he began thickly.

" Blackmailing your uncle, wasn't he, now? " The Inspector maintained an unemotional note in his voice. " Well, you needn't answer. We know it right enough. Got the papers."

" Oh, I see," said the writer blankly. " You've—got the papers."

He sat down again, rather heavily, knocked out his pipe into the grate and stared at the ashes. Then he squared his shoulders, rather with the air of a man who has just been relieved of a heavy burden.

" Then I suppose it's all right," he said. " I mean—you'll return them to my uncle."

" No doubt, in due course," the Inspector replied, regretting that he had not himself studied the papers. " I can't say myself, of course."

" Meaning *you* don't know what's in 'em? " enquired Mr. Godfrey shrewdly. " Well, there's nothing criminal. Just something my uncle didn't want to be known."

" If that's so, sir, there'll certainly be no trouble," he was assured. " And now, sir—your message? "

Mr. Godfrey stooped and produced a tin of tobacco from the floor underneath the chair, and slowly filled his pipe. Sergeant Dimsdale, standing behind him, caught the Inspector's eye and jerked his head meaningly towards the window by which he had been standing. The Inspector frowned perplexedly.

" I—really don't quite see——" said Mr. Godfrey slowly. The Sergeant coughed.

" One moment, sir," said Augur. " What is it, Sergeant ? " And the two men moved towards the window as if for a private consultation. Mr. Godfrey sprang to his feet and began rather loudly to explain that the message now could have no possible interest for anyone.

The Inspector ignored him. The writer almost pushed past, reached the window first, and turned to face the two officers. He stood more or less in front of the small table on the left and indeed almost sat on its edge.

" Preposterous ! " he shouted. " If not worse. What on earth right have you got to come down here like this and——"

His voice trailed away to silence, as Sergeant Dimsdale firmly leant over and picked up a print of a photograph. He handed it to the Inspector.

" That's Anderson, sir," he said.

Mr. Godfrey swore, then shrugged his shoulders ; he turned his back on the two officers and lit his pipe rather elaborately.

Inspector Augur stared at a half-plate photograph of a scene by the seaside. In one deck-chair sat a stout and unattractive gentleman in a bathing-dress of which the upper half was striped ; he was turning towards his companion, whose hand he was holding, and whom he was regarding with an amorous leer : and his companion, in a second deck-chair almost touching his, was a pretty girl, clad in a very close-fitting garment and a bathing-cap. She too was seen in profile and if the Inspector was not mistaken her smile was less enthusiastic than Mr. Anderson's—for that it was Mr. Anderson he had no doubt at all. And he had no more doubt about the scene being Prince's Bay, though there was little to identify it in the background.

Without a word, Augur leant over the table no longer barred from him by Mr. Godfrey. A large and crumpled sheet of blotting-paper—crumpled, no doubt, a second before—contained a whole series of prints. They evidently had been laid out to dry. He scrutinised them, and quickly picked out one other which showed the same couple. This time the lady was apparently in the act of leaving her chair ; her face was hidden, as she turned and leant with her hands on her companion's shoulder—as if she was telling him to stay where he was, and suiting the action to the word.

The Inspector drew a deep breath. Was she just leaning on his shoulders or—— But it could not be more than that ; Mr. Anderson's leer was more noticeable than ever, and his right hand was just visible on the girl's waist, as if he was drawing her towards him.

The painful silence was broken only by the sound of puffing from Mr. Godfrey and the rustle of paper as the Inspector ran quickly through the remainder of the prints. They seemed to be just a miscellaneous collection of " beach views," the sort of thing which Huskisson had described.

He turned grimly to the " writing gentleman."

" Well, Mr. Godfrey ? "

" Jolly, aren't they ? " He had fully recovered his composure now.

" Photographs of Mr. Anderson, eh, and taken last Sunday at Prince's Bay ? No, sir. Don't say anything," and Augur solemnly delivered the statutory warning.

Mr. Godfrey laughed, though he did not seem very amused.

" I was afraid you'd spot 'em," he said ruefully. " Oh, it's all right. I hardly imagine you think *I* did

him in. I shouldn't have been fool enough to ring him up afterwards if I had done, should I ? "

He saw that the point was well taken, and continued,

" I suppose I'd better tell you all about it. After all, if you've got those papers, it really doesn't matter."

" You mean you're ready to make a statement, sir ? " Augur asked, and the other nodded.

" Then would you mind coming with me to the Yard and making it there ? "

" Well—no, I suppose not. I've got a lot of work to do but—oh, very well. I'll get a coat and hat."

He moved towards the door, and Augur thoughtfully went with him. The manœuvre was rewarded by a gleam of amusement in the blue eyes.

" I'd like to have a look at your camera, Mr. Godfrey," the officer observed as they went upstairs together, " and I think we'll take the plates of those photographs."

Mr. Godfrey assented willingly enough ; he adorned himself with a bow-tie, changed his well-worn pumps for a pair of walking-shoes, rolled down his sleeves and donned a rough tweed jacket.

" Plates, plates," he murmured. " Now where the devil did I put them ? Oh, I know," and he led the way back to the sitting-room and burrowed in a drawer of the writing-table.

" There," he said, pressing the pile into the Sergeant's hands. " And now the camera." He looked wildly about the room.

" Mrs. East," he bellowed, so suddenly and loudly that the Sergeant almost dropped his burden.

" Where's my big camera, Mrs. East, d'you know ? "

he demanded as she appeared in the doorway, wiping her hands on her apron.

" Well, now, sir, I seen it only the other day. In the 'all, I do believe."

Triumphantly she unearthed, from a very unpromising heap of books, a large brown leather case. Augur took it from her and opened it.

" Press camera, I see, sir ? " he observed pleasantly.

" I daresay it's the same sort as journalists use," was the indifferent reply. " Anyhow it's pretty well foolproof. That's why I got it. But let's be off, shall we ? " And noticing a surprised look on the Inspector's face he added, in explanation of his hurry, that the sooner they started the sooner he'd be back.

" Shall you be hin to lunch, sir ? " asked Mrs. East.

" Certainly," said her employer, confidently ; then with a smile he told her that if after all he was unexpectedly detained he would ring up.

The Inspector let it go at that. The three men got into the car, the Sergeant in front with the driver and the Inspector and Mr. Godfrey side by side at the back. A few minutes after they had started, Mr. Godfrey laughed and turned to the Inspector.

" If you do make me late for lunch," he said, " you'll have to let me have the use of your telephone. That's what comes of doing things in a hurry—I've come out without a penny in my pocket."

The Inspector maintained a discreet silence throughout the drive or replied very briefly to the breezy conversation in which his companion indulged. The latter sighed.

" Might be going to a funeral," he said, and towards the end of the drive he too fell silent.

At Scotland Yard he had only to wait a very short time before he was brought to the Chief Inspector's room, where that august personage awaited him in company with Augur, Dimsdale and a stenographer. The warning was duly repeated, and he readily enough agreed that he was making the statement of his own free will.

Some time ago, he said, he had become aware that his uncle was being blackmailed—the result of some youthful indiscretion. The old gentleman took it very hard, and though eventually he confided in his nephew, who was also his heir, he stoutly refused to go to the police. He was very proud of his position in "the county." He had always been very good to his nephew, and the latter determined to do his utmost to put a stop to the business. He had not much difficulty in discovering where Mr. Anderson lived, but to make his acquaintance was another matter; he was refused admission to his house, and the only course seemed to be to accost him in the street, but to have a row with him obviously would do more harm than good, and nothing else was likely to result from an encounter in the street. His efforts however led him to the discovery of the existence of Mrs. Anderson, and her hold over her husband, and on the other hand to an acquaintance with Mr. Anderson's mode of life, including his patronage of Risquetti's. This put an idea into his head and the man's trip to Prince's Bay gave him his opportunity. He had only to provide himself with a camera, and bide his time.

"I went down by car," he said, "and waited on the London road just before you get to Prince's Bay. I knew Anderson well by sight, and it was easy enough to spot

him in his car and follow along behind him. I left my car in the same park—I waited, of course, till I'd seen him and the girl he'd got with him go down to the shore. I followed on, took off my coat and my shoes and socks behind a tent, and started life again as a photographer. Oh, I should say that I'd spent about five minutes studying the regular photographers' methods. Then I just hung about. Taking photographs and of course keeping out of the regular fellows' way, till my couple turned up. That gave me a chance for a nice paddle " (he grinned) " while they bathed ; and when they came out I stalked them like—well, a hippopotamus describes him pretty well. And when they settled down all cosily in those two chairs——" He shrugged his shoulders expressively.

" I had to be a bit careful," he went on, " because I thought the man might object if he caught me taking his picture. But as you can see from the snapshot, he was thoroughly occupied. And I got a couple of beauties. The girl got up and left him just as I took the second of 'em, so I moved off a bit. A picture of him all alone was no use to me, and also he might be sitting up and taking notice of the world in general. Well, I hung about a few minutes, and then as the girl didn't come back, I thought I'd get a bit of lunch. A lot of people seemed to feel that way about it and I didn't want to become a conspicuous object on the seashore. So I pushed off and collected my belongings and went back to the car. And damn it, there was the girl hopping into the other car all on her lonesome and that old fat swine Anderson still in his chair by the sea.

" Well, I followed her car down to Prince's Beach, and by the Clock Tower she stopped and picked up

a new man. So I decided that there wouldn't be much more doing, so far as I was concerned. I went on to a hotel—the White Horse, I think it was—had lunch, and went straight back home. Developed my photographs that night—made a very professional job of it, too—and jumped for joy when I saw that I'd got a really stirring picture of Anderson's idea of Sabbath-keeping. And next morning—well, you see the idea of my message now, don't you? Of course, I'd not the foggiest notion that Anderson was no more. I frankly admit that I meant to hoist him with his own petard. Yes, if you like, to blackmail him into stopping his blackmail of my uncle. And—that's all, I think."

His audience had listened to this story with patient interest.

"Just a question or two, Mr. Godfrey," the Chief Inspector said, suavely, at the end.

"Certainly," was the reply—just a shade nervous, perhaps.

"You seem to have been very well informed both about Mr. Anderson's private life—I mean, his fear of his wife finding out the truth about his way of living. And also about his plans for this Sunday. Now how did you learn all that?"

Mr. Godfrey smiled.

"The Inspector here—oh, yes, Augur; sorry. I'm afraid Inspector Augur must have described my household to you, and given you the impression I'm one of the world's poor men. I'm not, really. I've a comfortable income, quite apart from what I earn by writing. So you see, I could easily spare a fiver or so, to rescue a prodigal uncle. In other words—I bought

my information from the late Mr. Anderson's major-domo. An unpleasant little reptile by the name of Crowther. We met—oh, ever so accidentally—in Crowther's favourite pub."

The Chief Inspector turned to Augur and smiled.

" I shall certainly want to talk to this Crowther," he said.

" Yes, sir," Augur answered, with a horrible sinking feeling. For when he had gone to his room, on his arrival with Mr. Godfrey, he had hastily read a note which lay on his table—announcing Mr. Crowther's unescorted departure that morning for Prince's Bay. Assuming as matter-of-fact an air as possible, he left the Chief's room, dashed to his own and put through a trunk call to Prince's Bay.

CHAPTER XVIII

A CALL IN CHELSEA

The news from Prince's Bay that Crowther had already departed as independently as he had come, was most disturbing. Augur tried to comfort himself by reflecting that the man had duly arrived at Prince's Bay and that there was no reason to suppose he would not equally appear back in London ; Mr. Godfrey's statement might present Crowther in a new light to the police, but the valet would not be aware of it. Still, he was very uneasy in mind when he returned to the Chief's room.

He was a good deal surprised to find it occupied only by Mr. Godfrey and Sergeant Dimsdale.

" The statement's being typed," the Sergeant answered his enquiring glance. " And the Chief's been called for by the Assistant Commissioner, sir."

After a moment's reflection, Augur directed that Mr. Godfrey should be conducted to his room.

" What about Mrs. East and my lunch ? " enquired the author.

" Won't keep you longer than is necessary," was the non-committal reply, with which he had to be content.

The trepidation with which Augur in solitary state awaited the Chief's return was not lessened when the door opened and he saw the expression on the great

man's face. He stamped to his desk and sat down heavily in his chair.

"What the —— have you been up to with the Herefordshire police, Augur?" he demanded. And when the Inspector protested that he had merely carried out his instructions in asking for discreet enquiries to be made about Sir Harry Godfrey, the Chief retorted that the discretion seemed to have been forgotten.

"Here's the devil and all of a fuss," he said savagely. "The man's a personal friend of the Lord Lieutenant, the Chief Constable and no doubt the Bishop and every M.P. for a hundred miles. And Scotland Yard, it seems, have been proposing that he should be put through the Third Degree."

The outburst did him good, for after fuming for a few minutes, he finally laughed rather ruefully, and in some sort apologised to Augur.

"Still, it just shows you how careful you've got to be," he said. "You're in the office too much, I reckon. Machines always expect people to be as insensitive as they are themselves."

Augur made no reply, and after a short silence the Chief returned to the case of the nephew.

"I don't think we can detain him," he observed.

"But surely, sir, the photographs——"

"I know, I know. But what do they amount to? Proof that Godfrey was in Prince's Bay and saw Anderson and this girl. But equally—they prove that Anderson was alive at the moment when the photographs were taken. Oh, I grant you that you can guess at a lot more—but thanks to this Herefordshire fuss I want something a bit more solid."

"I see, sir," said Augur, gloomily.

" I think that all we can do is to let him go back to his cottage. We shall keep him under observation of course—and I've given him a hint to that effect. He was rather amused," he ended, reflectively.

" You'll remember Huskisson suggested——" Augur began.

" Huskisson's hunch was a pretty good one. But it hasn't worked out quite as he expected. His idea was that the camera was a fake—a means of concealing a weapon and so on. But you can see for yourself that the case there "—he pointed to it on a side-table—" couldn't hold a dagger or anything as well as the camera."

After another brief interval of silence, the Chief Inspector observed that it would be necessary to get in touch again with Huskisson, and also to send him down two or three sets of the snapshots of Prince's Bay.

" Huskisson will have to try to identify the subjects," he explained, " and the order in which they were taken. That *may* clear Godfrey finally—give him a kind of alibi. And of course we must try to check his story of his movements, though I should say it's not very likely anyone noticed him."

" Shall I ring up Prince's Bay, sir ? "

" No, I'll fix that. Also the signing of Godfrey's statement. You'd better get on and see the other fellow—Muirfield, isn't it ? Get some food first."

" I'll take Dimsdale, shall I ? "

" No. He'll fix up about Godfrey."

Inspector Augur decided that the Chief's frame of mind had recovered its amiability ; yet it was with considerable trepidation that he recounted the Crowther escapade.

" Well, well," the Chief commented. " It's a nuisance —no, a worry. But as things stand we've really got no ground for complaint. The man's not a prisoner, after all."

Augur sighed gently, in relief, and took his departure. He told Sergeant Dimsdale of the rôle allotted to him, and warned Sergeant Overbury to be ready to start for Chelsea in an hour's time. Finally he spoke to Mr. Godfrey, pleasantly informing him that Mrs. East's culinary efforts would not be wasted. And with that he set off Strand-wards, in search of a quick and early lunch.

In the course of his meal—or, to be more accurate, at its conclusion, while he was discussing a cigarette and cup of coffee—it struck him that the Chief Inspector had said nothing about the use which was to be made of the photographs of Anderson and the girl. It was not very likely, perhaps, that they would lead immediately to the latter's identification ; in one her face was hardly visible. Still, they were better than the vague descriptions supplied from Prince's Bay and from Risquetti's Restaurant.

When he got back to the Yard he enquired about this, and found that the Chief had not overlooked the matter. Indeed, he was immediately supplied with prints of the two snapshots ; they were to be circulated in the ordinary way that afternoon, though not to the Press—that, Augur reflected, would follow on the later announcement that the identity of the dead man was known.

" Have a look at those," he said, tossing them over to Sergeant Overbury, who was ready and waiting in the Inspector's room ; and while the Sergeant poked his

sharp nose at them, his lips twitching in a contemptuous smile, the Inspector looked hastily through various reports and notes which were in the tray on his desk. There was nothing that promised to be helpful ; complete failure so far to trace the Chrysler on its outward or its homeward journey. . . .

" Well, Sergeant," he said, tossing the papers back into the tray, " we'd better be off. A taxi, I think."

Mr. Muirfield occupied, it seemed, a small house in Bylands Street, in that part of Chelsea which lies north of the King's Road, and which those who reside south of that thoroughfare are reluctant to admit is " really Chelsea at all " ; a queer little street, leading nowhere in particular ; a house consisting of a basement and two floors and containing perhaps six rooms in all, and all of them tiny. Its yellow-brown bricks had been repointed, its window-frames and doorway recently repainted. Evidently the street was in course of being " reclaimed " and two or three notice-boards farther down it suggested that the builders and agents were alive to this fact. There was no sign of a plain-clothes man, which suggested that Mr. Muirfield was out.

Inspector Augur and Sergeant Overbury mounted the steps and rang the bell ; waited, and rang it again ; beat loudly with the knocker ; went through the processes afresh ; no result. The Inspector thoughtfully walked out into the road and surveyed the house. An open window on the top floor suggested that it was only temporarily unoccupied. There was nothing for it but to wait, and the two men began to stroll gently up and down the opposite side of the street.

After a quarter of an hour or so, during which no one had gone near the house—and indeed passers-by were

few and far between—Augur began to wonder whether he was merely wasting his time. Should he leave the job to Overbury, and himself return to the Yard? But he remembered that the Chief had hinted that he was overfond of the Yard; and on the other hand Overbury might be just the wrong man to tackle this interview on his own.

And then, just as they were nearing the corner of the King's Road, a girl turned into Bylands Street; she stepped off the pavement to cross to the other side when she was five or six yards from the two officers, and presented them with an excellent view of her profile. The two men looked sharply at one another.

"Very like the photograph," muttered Augur.

"It's her, right enough," the Sergeant answered.

They reached the corner, stopped, and turned. The girl was just ascending the steps of Mr. Muirfield's house. They saw her take a key out of her bag, open the door, and disappear within. They walked sharply back, and once again the Inspector rang the bell. A second or two later they heard light footsteps approach the door.

It opened; the girl, still wearing her close-fitting black hat, which showed just a glimpse of fair hair, looked at them enquiringly.

"Is Mr. Muirfield in?" the Inspector enquired in his politest tone.

"What do you want?" the girl demanded.

"I'm Inspector Augur, of New Scotland Yard," he replied and produced his card. "I want a word with Mr. Muirfield, if he's in. Just a simple enquiry."

She looked at the two men very dubiously.

" I'm afraid that if you haven't got an appointment——" she began. At that moment the telephone rang, in the front room, and she turned, uncertain what to do next. The Inspector seized the opportunity to advance a foot unostentatiously over the threshold.

" Answer it, ma'am," he said, smiling. " And don't worry. I'm not trying to burgle the house or anything."

The girl looked at him with an expression which he found it hard to read, and then without another word open the door into the room in which the bell was ringing, and disappeared from view. She left the door opened behind her, no doubt as a precaution ; it enabled Augur, advancing a yard or so into the narrow passage which was all the " hall " of which the house could boast, to overhear the conversation without difficulty.

" Yes, dear. Yes. Just come in. But wait a—what, you have. Oh, how splendid ! Of course. Don't I ? But of course I am ! Marvellous, I think, yes, but do listen a moment, please. There's a policeman here. An Inspector from Scotland Yard. He wants to see you. . . . I don't know. I was just opening the door when you rang up. What am I to do ? . . . No, no, I'm sure he is. . . . Let him wait ? . . . How long. . . . Oh, all right. But do please hurry."

Sergeant Overbury's eyes met the Inspector's ; he too had entered the house, and his sharp ears had missed nothing of the girl's remarks. The Inspector nodded in answer to the look, his eyes narrowing ; the Sergeant's lips resumed their wolfish smile. Then all expression vanished from both their faces as the girl reappeared in the passage.

"My husband's on his way back now," she said. "Will you come in and wait?"

With a word of thanks they followed her into the room—a simply furnished sitting-room, well lined with books. The wall which once had divided it into two had been removed, so that it ran the whole depth of the house, with a window at each end. The Inspector stepped rather quickly towards the window, and turned so that he could have a good look at Mrs. Muirfield.

"Er—won't you sit down?" she asked rather nervously. "And if you'll excuse me—I'll just take off my hat."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Augur. How lucky, he reflected, that he had had a good look at her in her hat and that her hat was not far removed in shape from a bathing-cap.

The removal of the hat was not an operation which occupied much time; quick footsteps overhead, and then the sound of their descent of the low flight of stairs. In the interval the two men had no time to do more than glance about the room; this, on Augur's part, included a glance out of the far window, which was open. It looked on to a very small paved garden, at the end of which was a kind of outhouse, with a sloping tiled roof. Its two metal-framed casements, too, stood open, and showed him that it was in fact a workshop of some kind.

The two men were seated rather stiffly in the middle of the room when Mrs. Muirfield re-entered it. They rose, and were begged to seat themselves again.

"Will you—ought I to offer you a cigarette?" she enquired, still nervously. The Inspector declined, with thanks. Mrs. Muirfield seated herself in one of the two

arm-chairs beside the fireplace. She was certainly pleasant to look at.

" Hope you don't mind my setting you a bad example," she said, lighting a cigarette herself.

A rather uncomfortable silence ensued.

At last, " Do you want to see my husband about anything in particular ? " she asked.

Augur coughed, then smiled.

" Well, I've come to see him specially, ma'am," he said. " But I think I'd better leave it till he comes. D'you think he'll be long ? "

" Oh, no, I don't think so," she said, very little reassured by the way in which he had met her question by another.

" Far to come ? " he went on blandly. " I don't want to keep you——"

" He rang up from the City," she answered, a shade reluctantly.

" Ah, yes. He's an engineer, isn't he ? In fact, an inventor ? " She hesitated, and he went on quickly, " I couldn't help overhearing what you said on the telephone, ma'am. I hope I guessed right."

Her eyes opened wide as if in alarm, but she seemed to be getting her nerves under better control : for the alarm gave place to another and more intentional expression. " Making eyes," was Sergeant Overbury's entry in his mental record.

" Rather depends what you guessed," she said.

" Why, that he's just sold an invention."

" Yes," she answered brightly, " you did guess right."

" And what was the invention, ma'am, if I may ask ? "

" Don't ask me. I don't understand these things. Ask my husband when he gets back."

The Inspector laughed.

" I'm afraid he'll think I'm poking my nose into what's no affair of mine."

Another heavy silence followed, and then the girl asked whether they would like some tea. Once more her invitation was politely declined—" afraid it's against the rules, ma'am, as we're on duty."

" What a shame. And such a hot day."

" Nice and cool in here, though, ma'am. Though I admit it's the sort of day I'd rather spend by the sea-side myself, than in London."

The shot certainly told ; her nervousness returned, and the conversation died away again.

At length there came the sound of a car; it drew up before the house, with that little tinkle of the meter which betrays the taxi. The girl sprang to her feet, and the two men followed her example. The Sergeant moved to the window and looked out into the street ; the Inspector followed Mrs. Muirfield to the door into the hall and witnessed her silent but affectionate greeting of her husband.

" Where's this Inspector ? Ah, there you are."

Mr. Muirfield followed his wife into the sitting-room and tossed his rather battered felt hat on to the table. He stood with his back to the fireplace and his wife stood beside him, her arm slipped through his.

He was clearly some years older than she was ; his dark hair was streaked with grey. His eyes were small, and the eyebrows above them thick and fierce. His complexion was chiefly noticeable for being what is sometimes called " blue-jowled," though technically

clean-shaven except for a dark moustache. He was of medium height and slender build ; his fingers looked as if they and manual work were by no means strangers. He was rather shabbily dressed in baggy grey flannel trousers and a well-worn blue coat.

" Well, Inspector, what can I do for you ? " he asked, rather defiantly.

" I'm enquiring into the loss of certain documents—plans, perhaps I should say—from a house in Elder Place. Mr. William Anderson's. They—disappeared at about ten p.m. on Sunday last."

There was a tense silence, broken by a rather forced laugh from Mr. Muirfield.

" Well, what's it got to do with me ? " he demanded.

" I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me what the invention was which you've just sold, Mr. Muirfield. Yes, the one you telephoned about just as we arrived here."

The man and wife exchanged a quick glance.

" Oh, come," said the former, " that's pretty nearly an accusation, isn't it ? "

The Inspector, not very convincingly, protested that it was not so meant. Mr. Muirfield frowned thoughtfully at the carpet.

" Ten o'clock Sunday," he said. " Let's see. What did we do on Sunday ? "

The girl looked up at him anxiously.

" I know ! " he said triumphantly. " You went to the pictures, dear, and I stayed in here working. And Joe Benham rang up—yes, I should say it was about a couple of minutes before ten."

" Now really, Mr. Muirfield," Augur began, in a

deprecating tone, whilst Overbury's expression became rather glum, " you mustn't think I——"

" Oh, rot. You practically accused me in so many words—I insist. You take down Mr. Benham's address, and ask him whether I wasn't here at ten o'clock or so on Sunday. And it'd take some time to get here from —what's the place you mentioned ? "

He was vehement in his insistence on his alibi being tested. Augur wondered whether he was not a shade too vehement. However, the name and address were duly noted.

" And so that we may finally dispose of the whole thing," said Augur, a little maliciously, " perhaps you'd tell me about that invention that you've just sold ? Of course we can trace it through the Patent Office, if need be, but——"

He broke off, and watched Mr. Muirfield with an expectant smile. The inventor scowled at him.

" Why should I ? " he demanded. " You see Mr. Benham first. What I've invented is no business of yours."

" I told you he'd say that, Mrs. Muirfield." Augur turned to her with his pleasantest smile ; then it faded away, and his expression became solemn, indeed grim, as he turned back to her husband.

" I must warn you," he said, " that this is a very serious matter. We're not only interested in what happened at ten o'clock on Sunday ; we're also interested in what happened at noon—at Prince's Bay " ; and pulling from his pocket the photograph of the couple in the deck-chairs, he handed it to Mr. Muirfield.

The man looked at it, and his wife too. While an angry flush mounted to his cheeks and his jaw tightened,

she went very white. As if involuntarily he clenched his hand, and crumpled the photograph.

"What the hell is the idea?" he demanded; he assumed an ugly and threatening look. "Scotland Yard, are you? Think I can't see through that? Blackmail, eh?"

Augur shook his head.

"No. Murder. Mr. William Anderson was murdered on the sands at Prince's Bay soon after midday on Sunday last——" and heedless of Mr. Muirfield's startled exclamation and his wife's half-checked scream, he delivered the warning which the regulations prescribe.

CHAPTER XIX

INTERVIEW WITH AN INVENTOR

A few minutes later a dazed and shaken couple were seated face to face with the two policemen in a taxi which was driving them rapidly to Scotland Yard.

"This is all a ghastly mistake," Mr. Muirfield had burst out, and ignoring the Inspector's wise advice that he should in the first place consult his solicitor, he insisted that he and his wife should at once be taken to Scotland Yard, there to make a statement.

"As far as I can make out, you're not arresting me, are you?"

"No, sir. I've warned you, because—well, you might render yourself—or Mrs. Muirfield—liable to arrest by what you said."

The drive was not a comfortable one. Mr. Muirfield, though manifestly very worried, was chiefly occupied in a not very successful effort to reassure his wife.

Inspector Augur was reflecting inwardly, not without some satisfaction, that they really seemed to be making progress; the elegant H. H. Huskisson must be finding the time hanging heavy on his hands down in Prince's Bay, and he would probably be furious when he learnt later in the day that the case had turned out to be a London one, and that there was no honour and glory coming to him through it; and meanwhile here was he, Augur, the man at whom he knew sly

digs were made because he stuck so closely to the office stool—here he was, showing that he was as good a commander in the field as the best of them.

Indeed he was not so far from the mark, at least so far as Huskisson's idleness was concerned ; not that his idleness was deliberate (strange to reflect how Victorian prosperity has inculcated the notion that lack of occupation is certain to be deliberate and calculated !)—for the fact of the matter was that he could see little for him to do at Prince's Bay.

When the inquest and lunch had both been disposed of, he returned once again to the shore and vainly tried to imagine how the murder had been committed in so public a place. A few days' familiarity had robbed the scene of a good deal of its charm ; he had soon forgotten one of his earliest impressions—the cleanness and tidiness of the sands—until he was reminded of the pains taken to keep them so. A nondescript individual, wearing a battered hat, with a large bag slung prominently by a broad belt dangling against his hip, was painstakingly harpooning such scraps of paper, cigarette-cards and the like as had got loose from groups of picnickers and were idly fluttering here and there. A gleam came suddenly into Huskisson's eye. He drew near to the harpooner and watched him closely—his weapon still more closely. He checked his impulse to go up to the man and ask to be allowed to examine the instrument ; it would be wiser to avoid arousing—well, curiosity, if nothing else. How was he to know whether this particular harpooner had been on duty at midday last Sunday ? Or how many confederates in the art he had ? Obviously it would not do bluntly to ask the man himself.

He hastened his steps back to the top of the cliffs, cursing the height of the stairway ; he hailed the first taxi which he saw and drove off to the Police Station.

The Superintendent was out ; Huskisson had to be content with imparting his idea to the stolid Sergeant Brewin, whom he found gloomily staring at nothing in particular.

" Well, Sergeant, day-dreaming ? " he asked, full of geniality begotten of his moment of inspiration.

The Sergeant snorted, a little indignant, a little surprised.

" Yes, in a manner of speaking," he admitted. " Can't get the Super to let me look into that car business."

" What car business ? There's no more to be done, down here. Don't you worry about that."

" No, sir, not that car. You know, the one that was pinched for a joy-ride, as it seems."

" What ! The one that was found about an hour later, about a hundred yards away ? What on earth d'you think that's got to do with this case ? "

" Don't know. But I've got a hunch."

Huskisson laughed in unfeigned amusement.

" Well, it's funny it was pinched—yes, joy-ride or no joy-ride—just about the time of the murder," Brewin maintained stubbornly. " I'm going to look into it, if I have to do it in my off-time."

He frowned, in deep perplexity, and nodded. " I must find that fellow, Carter. Meant to catch him at the inquest but he wasn't there."

" Obviously not." Huskisson impatiently decided not to waste more time listening to the Sergeant's

" hunches." " He wasn't a witness, so naturally he wasn't there. Go and see him to-night."

" But——" Brewin began to protest. His superior paid no attention.

" Look here," he said, " I think I know how the job was done."

" The car, you mean, sir."

" No, I mean the murder."

This effectively recalled Brewin from his private theorising ; his eyes goggled. Huskisson repeated complacently that he was pretty sure he had discovered the weapon.

" It explains those grains of sand in the wound, what's more," he continued.

In a couple of sentences he enlightened the excited Sergeant.

" By God, sir, that's it sure enough. Fools we were, not to think of it."

" Well, I suppose you might have been expected to be familiar with the common objects of your own seashore," Huskisson commented, thus giving to the Sergeant's " we " a meaning not wholly meant by its user. " And now, here's a job for you. Don't worry—the Superintendent certainly would agree to your taking it on ; I'll make it square with him—about you taking instructions from me, and so on."

Brewin groaned inwardly as he heard what his job was to be : just the sort of job that always fell to his share : a round of questions, and then someone else putting the answers together and getting all the credit ; and the round would be paid in a blazing hot sun. However, his but to do and sweat.

" Yes, sir. I see. What you really want to know is

where these men—scavengers I'd call 'em—were between twelve and one o'clock on Sunday. Oh, yes. And their sticks—spikes, yes."

He scratched the back of his head thoughtfully.

"Well, I really don't rightly know where to begin, but——"

He took his hat down from its peg, clapped it quite fiercely on his head and strode out into the street; and the elegant and elated Inspector made his way to the Superintendent's room, to await that worthy's return. A pipe would, he felt, at once reward him for his inspiration, aid him to develop it further, and help to pass the time until he could astonish the Superintendent. He smiled gently, as he puffed out a cloud of smoke. There was something to be said for office work, he thought; no wonder Augur, having got his foot in, was jolly careful not to take it out again.

As a matter of fact, Augur at that moment was finding none of the tranquillity which Huskisson imagined that he habitually enjoyed.

The Chief had himself, in Augur's presence, interrogated the two Muirfields, though he was at pains to explain that his interrogation was only intended to make their statements clearer and more coherent. Of course, they need not answer any or all of his questions if they preferred not to do so; there was no Third Degree business here. Augur nodded impressively. The stenographer poised his pencil.

"I'll tell you the whole story, not omitting the parts which—well, might seem to count against me. In fact, to explain things I must kick off with one."

He hesitated; his wife clasped her gloved hands

tightly together, and moistened her lips with the tip of her tongue.

"Anderson was a thief," Muirfield broke out, and went on to recount the story which already had been known or guessed from what the clerk, Pepper, had said; in all good faith, on the strength of a casual introduction, Muirfield had taken along to Anderson the drawings and particulars of an invention of his—a mechanical apparatus for use in offices; a simplified type of dictaphone. No, nothing to do with wireless.

Anderson had professed to be interested, and had kept the papers for further study. Like a fool the inventor had not yet protected them, and worse still, he had trusted Anderson—and when next he went to see him, having heard nothing from him for over a fortnight, Anderson denied point blank that he had got the plans at all.

"And after that he wouldn't see me," Muirfield concluded, and again paused.

"So you ascertained where he kept the plans—or at least that he did not keep them at his office?" the Chief interposed suavely.

"Yes—no, I didn't. What d'you mean? I don't understand." The inventor seemed not a little confused, and his wife moved restlessly.

"Never mind," said the Chief, smiling. "Go on, please."

"Certainly." His tone was defiant. "Well, I couldn't see what was to be done. Of course, I set to work to get out a duplicate set of drawings and so on, and I was on the look-out to try and prevent Anderson taking out a patent on his own account. I made sure that he hadn't applied yet for one. As a matter of fact"

(and here his audience got the impression that a sudden idea had come into his mind), " I fancied that I could make a small alteration which would improve the design and also enable me to take out a separate patent. But the main thing, of course, was to keep in touch with Anderson."

He glanced at his wife, who reddened.

" My—wife helped me," he said, with difficulty overcoming his emotion. " She—struck up an acquaintance with Anderson. Easy enough. I—don't mind admitting I hated it," he went on.

" So did I," his wife added in a low voice, smiling faintly.

" Beastly, of course. At first I wouldn't let her. You know, thought of the proverb about touching pitch. But—well, I knew Helen—my wife, I mean. What did it matter what other people, with filthy minds, might say or think? We were a partnership, after all. We'd had a hard enough time to make both ends meet. Our prosperity was worth a bit more than a waiter's grin behind your back, wasn't it? So I agreed."

" Agreed to what, exactly? " asked the Chief Inspector, in a tone which rendered the question as inoffensive as possible. The inventor glowered at him.

" Why, to her letting Anderson—pick her up. He gave her lunch two or three times, at that restaurant—Risquetti's—you know—typical resort of business men with wives in the suburbs. I was there each time—not too far away and not too near. It didn't really help much—no, Helen ; that's the truth, isn't it? Beyond her finding out that he wasn't in a hurry to push on with the invention. He was quite sure he'd got me

taped, I suppose. So—well, we'd quite decided that Mr. Anderson would have to lose his lady friend when —damn it, the swine asked her to go off with him to Prince's Bay for the week-end."

Mr. Muirfield shook with fury at the recollection.

" She told me after lunch," he resumed. " I'm afraid I lost my temper. Wanted to go and give the brute the hiding he deserved. Told my wife she ought to have thrown a plate of soup over him and left the restaurant then and there. Instead of which—she'd said she'd let him know by telephone whether she could manage it. I thought she'd gone off her head. And then—she showed me the funny side of it."

He turned towards her, and she smiled faintly up at him.

" It seemed to us both that it was a good chance to teach him a lesson. We fixed up a—well, call it a practical joke. The idea was to leave him stranded in Prince's Bay, with nothing to his name but a bathing-dress."

There was a silence.

" Sounds pretty feeble now "—Mr. Muirfield took up his tale again—" but believe me, if you'd known Anderson you'd have seen it was just the way to get him on the raw. Mind you, our idea was only to punish him for what he'd said to my wife—not for the theft of my invention."

He checked himself, but receiving no help from the Chief or from Augur, he went on once more.

" Mind you, we thought that possibly there might be something doing there too—about the invention, I mean. Apparently though Anderson was separated from his wife she kept a sharp eye on his doings ; a

little trip to Prince's Bay might be a thing he'd like to keep quiet."

"I see why you were so ready to think of blackmail when I called at your house," Augur ventured to comment. The inventor flushed angrily.

"Blackmail be damned!" he said. "Hadn't the brute stolen my plans? Would it have been blackmail to get them back—however I did it?"

The Chief coughed.

"And did you get them back?" he asked quickly.

"How could I? Didn't you—or the Inspector here tell me that Anderson was—murdered, before he got back to London?"

"Quite so, Mr. Muirfield. Perhaps the plans after all are lying in the safe at Mr. Anderson's office—we've only opened the one in his house and they weren't there. Altogether it seems as if your alibi was wasted, doesn't it?"

The inventor stared at him, saying never a word.

"Well, let that be for the moment. Let's hear instead how the trip to Prince's Bay worked out in practice."

"According to plan," the other retorted, rather sharply. "I went down by train—the first train on Sunday morning. My wife arranged to meet Anderson in front of the National Gallery. I knew about how long they'd take to get down and we'd arranged that my wife would insist on a bathe, first thing. When I found there was the one obvious car-park—apart, I mean from Prince's Beach; I knew of course that they'd give *that* a miss—well, my job was easy. I just waited about till they turned up. Then I followed them down to the changing-rooms, carrying a small suit-case with

me. It was pretty simple to change next door to Anderson—in the next cubicle, that is. Then I bathed, keeping an eye on the others, of course."

Once more Mrs. Muirfield reddened at what his words might seem to imply.

" The water was as warm as treacle, so I didn't mind staying in it till my wife got up and left Anderson alone in his chair. Then I hurried back and dressed. The attendants at the changing-place were thoroughly occupied, and it was as easy as toffee when I'd dressed to nip into the cubicle next door and cram Anderson's clothes into my suit-case. I waited outside till my wife appeared ; then I set off as fast as I could, caught a tram and waited again for her by the Clock Tower. She'd got the ticket for the car-park, and came along in Anderson's car. We drove back to London together, and on the way I repacked Anderson's kit in his own suit-case. Then we went home."

He ended abruptly. The Chief Inspector thoughtfully prodded the blotter in front of him with a steel paper-knife.

" And the car ? " he asked.

" We—er—abandoned it," said Muirfield, decidedly embarrassed.

" Exactly so. A serious matter in itself. But not the most serious. First of all, what evidence is there that Anderson was still alive when you left him ? "

" Why, I tell you I saw—oh, I see. You mean that I——" His voice trailed away.

" But surely you believe him ? " the girl broke out, for the first time taking a share in the conversation. " That photograph—it must have been taken just as I was going, and Jim—my husband, I mean—was still in

the sea. He came out farther along the shore and we went up to the dressing-rooms together."

The Chief Inspector shook his head.

"Who's to prove that?"

"Look here," said Muirfield. "I don't even know how Anderson was killed. Was it poison? Because if so you don't suppose he'd have let me——"

Again he fell abruptly silent.

"As a matter of fact, it wasn't," said the Chief kindly, seeing that the man had suddenly realised that if poison had been used his wife would have been in a perilous position. "Let's say it was a crime of violence."

"You mean a weapon was used?"

"Yes. I'm being perfectly fair, you see."

"I appreciate that. And I'd like to know how on earth you suppose I managed to go bathing with a pistol or whatever it was concealed about me. Or d'you think I walked about holding it above my head or in my teeth for fear it would get wet?"

"That's all very well, Mr. Muirfield. But how do we know you went bathing at all? We've only your word for it."

The couple both of them looked thoroughly frightened.

"You see how it is," the Chief continued. "I don't say I disbelieve your story, but I can't run any risks. I'll have to keep you here for a while. You'd better get in touch with your solicitor. It's a matter of finding people to corroborate your story, it seems to me. And one other thing—I shall be applying for a warrant to search your house. Are you prepared to assist me by letting me have the key?"

Mr. Muirfield's hands shook as he detached a Yale

key from the bunch which he extracted from his pocket. The Chief Inspector took it with a word of thanks and handed it to Augur.

" The Inspector here will be going along at once," he said. " He'll bring back anything you require. You understand—you're not under arrest. You're just detained."

It may be doubted whether this news conveyed much comfort either to the inventor or to his wife.

CHAPTER XX

THE VANISHED VALET

The Chief Inspector held a brief consultation with the Inspector and the Sergeant before they set off to search the house in Bylands Street.

" I'm inclined," he said, " to think these two have told the truth—as far as they've gone. I mean to say, I think they know nothing about the murder. It's obvious that the man was ready with an alibi—but for the wrong time. Ten o'clock is the time when something happened in which Muirfield was involved—and that's the time when someone walked into Anderson's house and opened the safe. It's as clear as daylight, isn't it ? Admittedly he had Anderson's clothes, including the keys. The alibi is a fake—unless (and this is quite possible) it was the girl who did the burgling part of the show. Anyhow, the alibi must be checked. And in the second place, there's the question ' what became of Anderson's car between the time when it came back from Prince's Bay and the time when it was abandoned in the Park ' ? People in Bylands Street may have seen it ; and most likely it was shoved into a neighbouring garage."

Inspector Augur decided that to save time Sergeant Overbury should enquire about the car whilst he made a preliminary search of the house. Having already a very definite idea about that alibi, he went straight to

the workshop at the back, and immediately found that his idea was a sound one.

Mr. Muirfield had not only been experimenting with the " simplified dictaphone " ; he had been working at a machine very like the ingenious " Recordophone " instrument which is in use in a good many countries in Europe, though our advanced British Post Office does not allow its use here. It is in fact a telephone Robot : for it answers the telephone, announces that Mr. So-and-so is out, and takes down a " message " in the form of a gramophone record.

Augur collected a number of " records " which he found in a cupboard in the sitting-room ; he examined the actual telephone receiver and observed a number of tell-tale scratches on it. Then he embarked on an examination of the rest of the house and though he found nothing further of special interest—not even correspondence about the invention which Mr. Muirfield apparently had just sold—he was in very good spirits when Sergeant Overbury put in an appearance.

The Sergeant was equally pleased with himself. No serious efforts seemed to have been made to conceal the movements of the Chrysler car. Two neighbours testified that it had stood for some little time outside the house, and then had disappeared ; the invasion of the street by " the idle rich " was not popular, and the appearance of a large car had been noted as another sign of the times.

Muirfield and his wife presumably had spent some time discussing their next move ; then the man had driven the car round to a large garage in the King's Road, announcing that he would call and remove it

later in the day. There had been nothing to arouse comment either in him or in the car ; the garage hand remembered the incident mainly because it happened on a hot Sunday afternoon in summer—when business was particularly slack. He could not say exactly when the car had been taken away, but was certain (as the books showed) that it had not been left over the night. He had a vague recollection that Mr. Muirfield had been differently and more smartly dressed on his second visit.

Augur briefly imparted to the Sergeant his own discoveries.

" That settles it, sir," said the latter gleefully, but the Inspector still looked a little thoughtful.

" I think we'll need to have a word with this Mr. Benham," he observed, " and what's more, I wonder how Muirfield knew that there'd be no one at Elder Place at ten o'clock."

" Crowther," suggested Overbury, briefly ; but the other shook his head doubtfully.

" Possible. I know that Godfrey admitted in so many words that a bribe had done the trick, but Muirfield didn't suggest that he'd adopted the same plan. However," he went on more briskly, " we'll pop round to Elder Place and see what we can pick up."

They hastily collected the odds and ends which the two Muirfields had asked for, then bustled into a cab and set out in search of Mr. Benham, who proved to be a rather ineffective young gentleman living in comfortable rooms in Ebury Street. Augur in a few words, but without entering into particulars of the real nature of the case, explained the object of his visit.

" Ten o'clock on Sunday ? Certainly, I remember.

I was rather sick about it at the time. Of course Muirfield's a funny-tempered devil—genius and all that, I suppose. Still, considering that—well, the point is that he'd *told* me to ring up at ten o'clock and say whether I'd go round and see them. You know, bit of a party in a small way. And then when I did ring up " (his voice rose to a higher key as he remembered his treatment), " he just snapped at me, ' That you, Joe ? Sorry, I'm busy. The show's off '—and hung up the receiver."

" You're sure it *was* Mr. Muirfield speaking ? " asked Augur.

" Good Lord, yes. Know his voice anywhere. And as a matter of fact, I rang up again : I mean to say, I thought I'd just remind him I was ringing up because he'd asked me to—no need to snap my head off, and all that."

" Well, sir ? "

" Well, I'd hardly begun to speak when he said—pretty well shouted that he'd already told me he was busy and he really couldn't be interrupted. And then I was just going to suggest that it sounded as if Helen—that's Mrs. Muirfield—must be having a dullish time and I'd pop round and cheer her up when he went on to say that she'd gone to the pictures. And damned if he didn't ring off again."

" You mean he said that about Mrs. Muirfield before you'd mentioned her name, sir ? "

" Yes. Just as if he was a what-d'you call-it—thought-reader."

The Inspector was hard put to it not to smile, partly in triumph and partly because evidently Mr. Muirfield had had little difficulty in reading

Mr. Benham's thoughts some time before he thought them. He thanked the youth for his help, ignored his manifest curiosity and withdrew.

"Goes like clockwork, doesn't it, sir?" Sergeant Overbury commented with a grin, as they drove to Elder Place.

"It does. And there's just a chance that one of these records" (he nodded at a parcel in the cab) "will actually give us Muirfield's words. But I should say he'd just have had sense enough to destroy that particular record."

At Elder Place the door was opened by the cook—at which Augur was assailed by an uneasy feeling. On announcing his identity, however, he had first to silence an excited outburst from Sarah, who denounced the Police and all their doings in no uncertain terms; the way they upset you after a murder and the way they did nothing to stop it happening. And here was Elsie come over queer as a result of the trip to Prince's Bay and that there Crowther—whom she described most inappropriately as a "saucy 'ound"—gallivanting about and leaving them to be hauled back by the scruff of their necks and never so much as see the briny . . .

Augur fairly roared at her, and abruptly brought her tirade to a standstill.

"Where's Crowther? D'you mean he's not back yet?"

"No, that 'e ain't. And what's more——"

"That'll do. The less you say the better. You can take it from me, Crowther will get it in the neck for this. But that can wait. Just you answer a few questions——"

Inwardly his heart sank. If Crowther had bolted—— However, there was just a chance that his sister knew something more about Sunday than she had told Sergeant Porritt. She did ; and he grunted with satisfaction when she admitted that rather before seven o'clock she had answered the telephone, Crowther being out, and had told the gentleman—a Mr. Brown, a friend, he said, of Mr. Anderson's—that it was no use his coming round between nine-thirty and ten-thirty to return some books which he'd borrowed because there would be no one to let him in.

" Which of course I wasn't shore of," she confessed, " seeing as Crowther might be 'ome any old time. But I guessed 'e'd be late, the master being awye, and I knew as 'ow Elsie and me'd be out till round about eleving."

Augur thought to himself how amazing it was that in spite of endless paragraphs in the most popular daily papers recounting the ruses of burglars to discover when houses would be unoccupied, domestic servants continued to be so idiotically credulous. Aloud he merely cautioned the cook against any imitation of her brother's conduct. " And, mind, whatever time of the day or night he turns up or communicates with you—Scotland Yard's to be informed at once."

As he left the house he fired a Parthian shot.

" All very fine for you to talk the way you did about the Police. You can just take it from me that if you and the others don't do as you're told, there's likely to be *another* murder before we're all much older."

The Inspector perhaps did not quite live up to his name. Or perhaps it is unreasonable to expect a prophet to be accurate in every detail. For example, it

was perhaps too much to require Crowther literally to " get it in the neck."

In fact he had been spending quite a pleasant day, if a less entertaining one than his sister's envy led her to suppose. As far as his movements subsequently could be traced it seemed that he had spent the rest of the morning at Prince's Beach, though there was no evidence that he had gone to the extreme length of bathing. He had then lunched handsomely, his partiality for cockles having made a distinct impression in the little eating-house which he had patronised ; he was the better remembered because he was only repeating the performance which he had given on the previous Sunday at a late hour. He had next sought to aid the process of digestion by repose on the sands—that a surfeit of cockles may be bad for the temper is suggested by his brutal treatment of a sand-castle and his savage refusal to apologise to the mother of the squalling family who had erected it. Then as the afternoon waned he had collected his motor-bicycle from the garage in which he had deposited it and jolted off inland. The machine was no " Silver Bullet " or " Golden Arrow " ; and moreover it is probable that he indulged in a little tour of the countryside instead of making a bee-line for Dennisford, where he ate a hearty supper at about seven o'clock. After which he announced his intention to stretch his legs a bit, and was seen to turn into a lane just outside the village.

By this time the shadows were deepening ; it is true that one or two couples who were in the lane probably would not have noticed him had he passed them, but apparently he left the lane at a stile about a hundred yards before the most popular and shady section.

He followed the footpath across the fields, skirting a little spinney and beyond it a disused chalk-pit. He reached the point where the path ran alongside a tall thick hedge—its thickness, moreover, reinforced by a couple of strands of barbed wire ; and beside the solitary five-barred gate which gave admittance to the meadow beyond was a spick and span notice-board announcing that trespassers would be prosecuted.

That Mr. Crowther had some Communist instincts is hardly to be disputed, or at least a tendency to rebel against recognised rules and authorities. Certain it is that he climbed over the gate ; his exact intention is less plain. Close by the gate, the other side of the hedge, was a small, tumble-down, wooden shed, doubtless erected for some good agricultural purpose, but allowed to fall to ruin. Its rickety door stood half open, its hinges were sadly rusted, its planks were a dingy black which perhaps melted into the dark background and made it practically invisible to the trespasser.

At all events, he stood a moment or two with his back to it, perhaps trying to shape his course across the field and to detect in the gathering darkness an exit the other side ; perhaps wondering whether it would not be more sensible to stick to the footpath, which presumably would lead him back to Dennisford and his motor-bicycle.

His thoughts and his intentions must remain a matter of conjecture ; he was never in a position to make them plain. For it was at this spot that Inspector Augur's prophecy failed to come wholly true ; for it was here that Crowther " got it," and if it was in the back of the head and not the neck the practical

effect was even more unpleasant—not to say disastrous.

His failure to show up in London after the inquest by now had become a matter of real concern to the Police. The Chief Inspector's complacency had more or less vanished ; another telephone call had come through from Prince's Bay, and Huskisson had been not a little disgruntled at the way in which his own important discovery of a weapon which probably had been used for the murder, had been swept on one side, and excited instructions given for a search for the missing valet.

" There's one point we seem to have overlooked," the Chief Inspector told him. " I think Crowther certainly was in the neighbourhood of Prince's Bay last Sunday. You remember it was he who told Mrs. Anderson of the description of the man who'd been found dead. Now that was given out by wireless, and Crowther knew it was—but it was only given out from the local station. There's no receiving set at 17 Elder Place which could have picked it up, nor was Crowther there at the time ; and people in London don't bother to pick up local English stations as a rule. Besides, Crowther said himself that he was out on his motor-bicycle that afternoon and evening. In other words he was somewhere where the wireless description was being discussed. And it's as plain as a pikestaff that the place where it was most likely to be discussed was the place where the body was found. So get on with it, Inspector ; I'll send Sergeant Overbury down to help you, and maybe I'll come down myself. Oh, yes ; very good work on your part : but I think we must have a general consultation—unless, of course, there are fresh developments at this end."

Inspector Huskisson hurried to the Superintendent's room. The latter had not been best pleased by the way in which "his" Sergeant had been ordered about by "these Scotland Yard" people; well, Huskisson would be delighted to leave it to the Superintendent to take charge of the new and elaborately detailed enquiry which the Chief Inspector seemed to think was now essential.

Superintendent Hawkins frowned as he listened to the recital.

"All very fine," he said, "but you don't imagine we keep an army of detectives down here, do you? And don't forget that Brewin is still engaged with the Prince's Bay Scavenging System."

CHAPTER XXI

MORE TEAM WORK

Huskisson expended a good deal of tact upon the Superintendent, and was at last rewarded by his return to his usual amiability ; whereupon, as discreetly as possible, he conveyed his own agreement with the Superintendent's view of the new enquiry.

" As a matter of fact," he observed, " it's really a routine enquiry. It's a matter of a notice to all stations, a word to the Press and a broadcast S.O.S. I think we can take it that the Yard is attending to all three ; but perhaps you can send a special warning to the stations hereabouts."

" Quite so," Hawkins agreed, with relief, and without more ado got busy on the telephone. With a faint smile, Huskisson noticed that in the most correct way he communicated first with the Chief Constable.

The telephoning was still in progress when Sergeant Brewin reported himself, hot and dusty but to outward seeming quite pleased with himself. The Superintendent briefly told him to sit down, which he did with obvious relief. Huskisson tactfully restrained his curiosity.

At last, " Well, Sergeant ? " the Superintendent demanded, turning to him.

The Sergeant with proper solemnity produced his notebook and thumbed its pages. The Yard man was hard put to it to conceal his scornful impatience.

" Appears there's three of these scavengers employed on the foreshore," Brewin announced. " Town Clerk got the information for me. All three of 'em are local men, been doing the job for a good many summers now. All three of good character, so far as is known. All three of 'em supposed to be at it all day of a Sunday. Mind you," he suddenly interrupted himself, " I'm speaking of the Bay, not the Beach."

" All right," said Huskisson, " I think that's as much as we need to worry about. Now for last Sunday."

" Well, last Sunday they were all three of them at it. Just go up and down, one following t'other, if you follow me. No regular beat or hours."

" They must stop sometimes," Huskisson burst out.

" I expect the Sergeant's just coming to that," the Superintendent suggested, mildly placatory.

" Yes, sir. I've seen the three men. Seemingly they all knocked off round about twelve o'clock. You see, they like to get down again when the crowd's not there. You can see best then how much muck has been left lying about."

" Yes ? Go on."

" Can't say to a minute, naturally. But round about twelve they all knocked off."

" Yes, but what do they do with their spikes——"

" Give 'em to someone who's on the job all the time, to look after. Two of the men, last Sunday, popped their gear into the Swimming Pool."

" What ? "

" I mean to say, they gave it in charge of the attendant there. I've seen him, too. He confirms that. You see, the two of 'em happened to be along that end

of the Bay at the same time, though I shouldn't wonder if they didn't fix it like that."

"And the third?"

"He left his by the car-park. You know, by the bandstand, there on the cliffs."

"Yes, yes, I know."

The Sergeant blinked indignantly at this impatience.

"The man—Holloway, his name is—swears he put his sack and spike in the little shelter there."

"In no one's charge, you mean?"

"Oh no, sir. In a manner of speaking, one end of the shelter is the office of the car-park attendant. Holloway asked him to keep an eye on the things. Same as he always does."

"Always?"

"What I mean is that the middle flight of steps is Holloway's shortest way home. He goes there for his dinner. So he usually puts his gear in that shelter, and it's an understood thing with the car-park attendant."

"That's Carter, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Superintendent Hawkins, a little sharply. He was no more pleased than Sergeant Brewin with Huskisson's attitude.

"And what does he say?" HHH asked, unmoved.

"That's just it," Brewin replied, almost triumphantly. "You'll remember I said I meant to go and have a talk to Carter, and you said I could do it in my off-time."

"I never said anything of the kind, as it happens," the Inspector observed wearily, "but it really doesn't matter. I gather that as it turned out you had no need to waste your own time on him."

"It's not that. Carter's gone."

" Gone? Where? What d'you mean?" his two auditors asked in duet.

" So it seems. He's not been seen since midday. They've had to put an emergency man on to take his place. And mighty cross they are about it."

" Still," the Superintendent suggested, in answer to Huskisson's unspoken thoughts, " there's no reason to doubt the word of this fellow Holloway, is there? I should think we could easily establish whether he was in the habit of putting his gear there when he went off for his dinner."

Huskisson looked thoughtful, and Brewin dubious.

" What is it, Sergeant? " he went on.

" Who's to corroborate? " Huskisson asked. " Though, mind you, I'm not clear what the Sergeant means when he says Carter has ' gone.' Is it simply that he's not been on the job? Has he been locked up, drunk or disorderly? "

" Of course, sir, I can't say," said Brewin. " It's simply that he hasn't been at the car-park. But—well, he only took on the job last Saturday."

" Then the man who had it before him can say whether the other chap—Holloway—usually left his stuff in the shelter."

" I think," Huskisson suggested, in dulcet tones, " that Sergeant Brewin's got quite a different idea in his head. This man Carter takes on the car-park job the day before the murder, and he leaves it the day of the inquest. Isn't that it? "

Brewin nodded, uncertain whether the Inspector intended to dismiss the idea with ridicule or—— The Superintendent looked startled and puzzled.

" There's something in the idea," the Inspector

continued, gravely. "At any rate, we shall have to look into the business. Because, you see, there's another fact which has a distinct bearing."

"What's that, sir?" asked Brewin incautiously.

"Didn't I hear that a car disappeared from the park somewhere about one o'clock—or between noon and one o'clock—on Sunday? When Carter was supposed to be on duty? It strikes me that either he was a very poor watchman or else—he wasn't there."

"You mean you think that he——" the Superintendent burst out.

"Not necessarily. But obviously if a car could be pinched so could that spike."

Sergeant Brewin gazed at the Inspector in speechless fury; it was he, Brewin, who had had a hunch about that stolen car, and now this slimy brute from London had practically pinched the idea.

"That was a bright idea of yours, Sergeant," the 'brute' from London went on smoothly. "You see how it fits into its proper place."

The Sergeant abandoned any attempt to protest; wasn't it just what he had expected? He would have to be content with this mean acknowledgment. Still, the Super probably would listen to the true story readily enough, when they were alone. His bitter reflections were interrupted by a sharp question from the Superintendent himself.

"What about Carter, Sergeant?"

"By the time I got as far as him, sir, the Town Hall was shut, so there was nothing doing——"

"But you could get hold of the Town Clerk——" began Superintendent Hawkins.

"Not much good, I fancy," Inspector Huskisson

smilingly supported the Sergeant. " It'd be a matter of routing out the clerk in charge of the records, I expect. And that's not likely to be easy on a warm summer evening."

" That's just it, sir," Brewin agreed. " There's no way of getting hold of Carter's address and so on till to-morrow morning that I can see."

There was a short pause in the conversation.

" Rather looks, sir," Huskisson addressed the Superintendent with mischievous deference, " as if we ought to take the same steps for Carter as for Crowther. They seem to be a pair."

The Superintendent nodded.

" Not much use to worry the Press yet, though," he said. " And I'll try the local station for a broadcast. It's all very fine, but for all we know Carter may be in hospital with a broken leg. We don't want to get into a panic straight away."

With this Huskisson cordially agreed. Sergeant Brewin was commended for his efforts and dismissed with instructions to get on to the question of Carter's papers and so on first thing in the morning. Huskisson, by way of further demonstrating his tactful friendliness, insisted on waiting until the Superintendent also had finished his work for the night ; some of the interval he whiled away by reporting the latest developments to the Chief Inspector at the Yard. His theories were not very greedily snapped up, but he had the gratification of hearing that the Chief was now finally decided to descend in person on Prince's Bay. He learnt also that there appeared to be no reason further to conceal the fact that the identity of the body on the beach had now been established.

"In other words," said HHH to himself, running things over in his mind while he consumed a whiskey and soda in the lounge of the Grand Hotel, preparatory to seeking his bed, "the London papers will come out to-morrow with the brilliant discovery of Anderson's identity—and a little note to say that the Chief Inspector's in charge of the case."

Still, he was glad that the Chief was coming down. He was very far from clear as to what had been happening in London. Nor must it be thought that though in most forms of "team work" the element of personal jealousy creeps in, that means that there is not team work as well. Huskisson's chief anxiety was the satisfactory conclusion of the case; the *kudos* which he might gain or deserve was an important but a secondary consideration.

Actually he had no means of being clear about events in London; of a good many there had been no obvious reason to inform him at all—for example, the decision after all not to detain Mr. and Mrs. Muirfield.

Inspector Augur had not been quite happy about this decision, but the Chief took it after a further personal talk with Mr. Godfrey. His belief that the couple knew nothing about the murder though in all likelihood they knew a good deal about the theft, seemed to be confirmed. For Godfrey was perfectly certain—and said so, even though he might be damaging himself thereby—that Anderson was still alive when the girl left him; secondly, that when he took his photographs of the two bathers in their deck-chairs there was no third bather, like or unlike Muirfield, lurking in the sea and ready to pounce upon his victim. Godfrey had, it is true, moved away, to avoid recognition,

when Mrs. Muirfield's departure left Anderson free and ready to observe the world in general ; but he had not moved so far away as to be out of sight, and he had kept an eye on that gross figure in the deck-chair, and he was prepared to swear that for the next four or five minutes at any rate no one went near it.

" Strikes me, sir, neither Godfrey nor the Muirfields are really clear," said Augur when this was recounted to him. " And then there's the taking of the papers from the safe *and* the ' borrowing ' and abandonment of the Chrysler."

The Chief shook his head.

" My lad," he observed, " there's no more evidence against the Muirfields than against Godfrey—and vice versa. You couldn't conceivably get a conviction against either ; and as for that safe—well, the evidence against Muirfield's stronger there, though it's still mainly circumstantial. But then—what did he steal ? Unless and until we open the office safe we can't be sure that even the plans—Muirfield's plans—are missing. No, Inspector, there's nothing for it but to let them all loose—give them rope—and see what they do with it."

He laughed at Augur's gloomy expression.

" Cheer up," he said. " You'll be in charge here tomorrow. I'm going down to Prince's Bay. And that being so, I propose to clear off home now."

And so it happened that the Chief Inspector, escorted by Sergeant Overbury, was well on his way to Prince's Bay, and Inspector Augur was seated rather importantly in the chair of authority when Superintendent Hawkins rang up in some excitement.

" Oh, the Chief Inspector's on his way down, is he ? That's good. Yes, there's been a fresh development.

I'll get the Chief Constable to come over and meet him. Oh, the development. Why, that fellow Crowther's been found. Dead. Back of his head blown away with a shot-gun. Found by a keeper early this morning. Place called Dennisford—quite near here, inland. No, we've not traced his movements at all yet. Inspector Huskisson's over there now, with one of my men."

With that he rang off, and by a stroke of luck (though possibly Major Dillon would not have described it so) caught the Chief Constable just as he was setting out for a distant part of his region, where he hoped to combine a round of golf with the sterner duties of life. He drove over at once to Prince's Bay and reached the Police Station half an hour or so before the Chief Inspector ; when the latter also arrived the three plunged at once into earnest consultation, with Sergeant Overbury sitting silent in the background, looking incredibly sly, and thoughtfully scrutinising a small bundle of papers, pinned untidily together, which he had picked up from the floor, whither they had been swept by an impetuous wave of Major Dillon's arm.

CHAPTER XXII

THE VALET'S RETURN

Inspector Huskisson had been shaving when the news reached him that Crowther's body had been found, on Colonel Graham Travers' estate near the village of Dennisford. The local station had rung up Prince's Bay, and the latter had promptly and in turn informed the Inspector and the Superintendent. After a very rapid consultation the former set off by car for the scene of the discovery, accompanied only by a constable. He crammed a couple of apples into his pocket in lieu of breakfast. Sergeant Brewin was to follow him as soon as he could.

The small size of the village made this a very different problem from that at the crowded seaside resort. Having already learnt that the landlord of the inn had identified Crowther as the man who had supped there the previous night, Huskisson's first step was to interrogate him.

He could learn nothing of special interest about Crowther's manner or conduct. He had eaten a hearty meal, and then had announced his intention to " walk it off." He had even asked the lordlord whether he could not stroll across the fields somewhere.

" Though I rides a motor-bike, 'e says to me," Mr. Hodges recounted, " I'm one as likes to get off the 'ighroad time and again, 'e says. Footpaths and

byways, 'e says. So I tells 'im two or three on 'em, and among 'em the path 'e must of took that runs past the gate where 'e was found."

This hardly suggested that the walk had had a more definite object than digestion.

Mr. Hodges admitted that he had thought it odd that he had seen no more of the visitor ; but Sunday evening, he explained, was a very busy time. He could not be in two places at once, and the " boy " was supposed to keep an eye on the yard, where Crowther had left his bicycle. In fact, it was not till the keeper had come along in the morning with news of his discovery and till he suddenly saw the motor-bicycle still in the barn where it had been put before supper, that he gave another thought to the man. The keeper had telephoned from the pub to the Police, and then accompanied by Mr. Hodges had returned to the scene of the tragedy.

" I suppose this is the nearest place he could telephone from ? " Huskisson commented.

" Ah," said Mr. Hodges, full of cunning. " Now is it ? "

The Inspector sharply bade him explain his meaning, and by dint of a severe cross-examination learnt that the keeper had thought it best to telephone neither from the lodge nor from the house, though both of them were nearer to the tumble-down shed than was the inn.

" And why was that ? Did he say ? " And then as the landlord hesitated, " Go on, man," he said. " I'll be seeing the keeper—what's his name ? Roberts ? Very well. I shall ask him too ; but we may as well save time."

"Well, sir, the 'ouse is more or less shut up. The Colonel's away and sent 'em all off on 'oliday barring Mrs. Capstick, and Roberts didn't like the notion of knockin' 'er up. She's a rough side to 'er tongue she 'as. And as for the lodge, well, if you must know, the gun what's lyin' alongside the corp belongs to Blackie—that's 'im as keeps the lodge. So you can see why Roberts didn't like——" He finished with an expressive wave of his hand.

Mr. Hodges had nothing more to recount, so the Inspector thanked him, obtained directions as to the course which Crowther apparently had followed the previous night, and accompanied by the constable, set out on foot to follow it himself; his car he left in Mr. Hodges' care.

"You needn't worry," he said, with a smile. "*I'll* be back for it right enough."

The ground was baked to cracking-point by the succession of blazing-hot days, and hardly yielded the trace of a footprint; the Inspector kept a very sharp look-out as he went, but saw nothing to deserve his attention until he reached the five-barred gate by the notice-board and the shed. The village constable and an obvious keeper were leaning on the gate, the latter smoking a short and foul clay pipe. He touched his hat respectfully to Huskisson (a tribute perhaps to his clothes rather than his official position) and the constable saluted.

Roberts in a soft Sussex voice recounted how he had made the discovery. He lived, it seemed, in the village, and this was his shortest way to his work. He had turned out a bit later than usual—somewhere about half-past six—to have a stroll round, like. And when

he climbed over the gate he saw "that," and he jerked his thumb towards the figure on the ground.

"Gave you a shock?"

"Surely."

Huskisson turned to the constable who had come with him, and bade him make a note of Roberts' address and so forth.

"And just tell him," he said to the keeper, "where you were last evening and so on."

He turned to the other constable.

"Nothing been touched?" he asked.

"Not since I bin here, sir. Except I made sure the corpse was dead."

This investigation, he assured his superior, had meant a minimum of movement of the body.

"Doctor seen it?" was Huskisson's next query. The constable shook his head.

"No, sir. Dr. Harrison was out, seeing a patient. That is, he was just a-starting off when I went for 'im on me way here on me bike."

The Inspector frowned.

"Why didn't he come here first?" he demanded.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, he said his first job was to look after them as was coming into the world; and the dead 'uns could wait. That's the doctor all over. It's Mrs. Johnson's first, sir."

"Well, I hope he'll be here soon," said Huskisson, the frown vanishing. "For everyone's sake."

It was not difficult to discover the cause of death; the back of the man's head had been blown away. Huskisson knelt down and gently moved the body so that he could see the face. It was certainly Crowther; he judged that he had been dead a good many hours.

He stood up again and looked thoughtfully at the dead man ; he lay face downwards but slightly on the right side. The clothes were just as they had been when Crowther had appeared at Prince's Bay, but the state of the left side pocket caught the Inspector's attention and he dropped on one knee to study it more closely. As he thought it was half inside-out, so to speak ; the lining was dragged and bunched, as if something had hastily been pulled out of it.

He turned his attention to the double-barrelled sporting-gun which lay a yard or so away from the body. The other three were now watching him, Roberts' movements having apparently been duly recorded by the constable.

The gun was carefully examined through a strong lens ; as far as Huskisson could see there were no clear finger-prints on the stock—very few, indeed, even of an indistinct kind ; but on the barrel just in front of the breech were distinct marks of fingers. He looked up at the local constable.

" This hasn't been touched, of course, either ? "

" Not by me, sir."

" I picked 'un up, sir," Roberts observed, rather nervously, " seeing it there, you see, naturally I——"

The Inspector was annoyed, but understood ; his annoyance deepened when Roberts admitted that he had picked up the gun by the part where the marks were distinct. That was that.

" Know whose gun it is ? " he asked the keeper.

" Blackie's, sir."

Something in the man's tone sharpened Huskisson's interest.

" Friend of yours ? "

"No, sir. That he bain't."

Huskisson made no comment, but rose to his feet, and again surveyed the general scene. The body was about a yard from the half-open door of the shed ; he stepped to the latter and peered within, and then rather gingerly tried to move the door. The lower hinge was broken and let the door itself drag on the ground. Once again he knelt down ; it was obvious that the door had recently been moved—a narrow strip of bleached, broken grass showed where it had stood for months. A curving scrape on a patch of bare dry earth completed the story. The door had been opened and then replaced very much, but not quite, as it had been before. Gingerly he pulled it wide open, the one remaining hinge groaning in protest. The bright sunshine streamed into the shed ; Huskisson declared his disappointment by making a click-cluck sound with his tongue. He had hoped, pretty confidently, that the floor would be thick in dust, and prettily patterned with footprints ; instead of which, though farther back in the interior the dust and dirt lay thick and undisturbed, the space immediately behind the door seemed to have been swept clear ; the earth was as bare and uninforming as the sun-baked soil outside. The explanation was not far to seek ; there it lay, in the shape of an old piece of sacking.

Still, the sweeping of the floor confirmed the Inspector's theory. The murderer had lain in wait inside the shed, the door half closed. Crowther must have stood with his back to it, and the gun thrust out from the shed must almost have been touching his head when both barrels were fired together. True, he might not have been standing still, but it seemed highly

probable that he had been; he had certainly climbed over the gate, and there was no obvious reason why he should have walked round in front of the hut and then turned at right-angles—a man drunk enough to indulge in such a zigzag course would hardly have been able to climb that gate.

Roberts and the two constables had been watching him in deep interest, so much so that a voice from behind them, from the footpath beyond the gate, startled them considerably.

It was the doctor, an alert, middle-aged man whose twinkling eye swept the scene and apparently found nothing very terrible in it.

" Seems as if I was right," he observed. " I conclude from the general appearance of things that *that* is beyond my services."

" Yes," said Huskisson and briefly introduced himself. " I don't think there's anything you can do for him, but there may be something you can do for me."

" Oho. The usual thing, I suppose : how long has he been dead ? I thought as much. But you know, Inspector, even we country G.P.'s are so up-to-date nowadays that we know we can't dogmatise about a thing like that."

" Certainly, sir," he answered respectfully, " I quite realise that. I realise too that you can't even say the cause of death for certain—whatever the appearances—till there's been a post-mortem. Still, it would help me if you could—quite provisionally—say whether you think I'm reasonable in assuming, as a working hypothesis, that death was due to a gunshot wound, and that death occurred round about nine o'clock last night."

Without another word the doctor examined the body. "Gunshot wound. Yes. That's an obvious assumption. I should think a perfectly safe one. Time of death —well, I can't say more than that your time isn't contrary to the superficial evidence."

After a moment's thought, the Inspector made his dispositions. Would Dr. Harrison be so very kind as to telephone to the Prince's Bay Police Station for an ambulance? He would; the Inspector was most grateful. Yes, the sooner the better; and perhaps he would be so kind as to supervise the removal of the body. "We'll just shift it, I think," he said and motioned to the two constables.

The body was lifted close to the hedge; Huskisson scrutinised the place where it had lain, but made no fresh discovery. The doctor already was on his way along the footpath, bag in hand.

"You'll stay here," the local constable was instructed, "till the ambulance comes. Then you'll go back—h'm—yes, to the pub. That'll do for my headquarters. Now you" (this to the other constable) "and Roberts, come along with me. We'll call on this Blackie."

As carefully as he could he picked up the gun; inwardly he was convinced that it would yield no help in the way of finger-prints, but he was only too well aware of the importance which some of his superiors and colleagues attached to that type of clue.

"You'll want the short cut across the fields?" Roberts enquired, and was bidden to lead the way by it. As they went, Huskisson interrogated the keeper afresh about his movements the previous evening—somewhat to the annoyance of the constable, who

already had made laborious notes on the subject; more laborious, perhaps, than was necessary, since the man had been in the public bar from eight o'clock until closing time, as several people in the village would be able to testify, and then had gone home, as his brother and sister-in-law, with whom he shared a cottage, could say.

"You had time to put a good deal away, hadn't you?" was the smiling comment.

"Surely," Roberts replied, with an answering grin, "but we country folk—we're slow."

Little more was said till they came to the end of fields, where a low iron railing marked the boundary of the garden. Roberts led the way to a gate, then down a grassy path which finally debouched on to a winding drive lined on either side by magnificent hedges. They turned to the left, and as they rounded the next curve, came in sight of the gates and the lodge. Smoke curled lazily from its chimney.

At this point the keeper showed a disposition to hang back, which Huskisson mentally attributed to his reluctance to face his colleague in the presence of that gun.

"Come on, Roberts," he said.

As it happened at that moment a man appeared from the lodge, caught sight of the three figures and stood staring at them. As they approached, they could see that his expression was one of blank amazement.

"Don't say you've caught a poacher at the last, George Roberts," was his greeting.

"A Tartar, I should say," Huskisson replied on his behalf, and announced his name and position. Blackie, the lodge-keeper, positively gaped.

"There's been an—accident," Huskisson went on, "and I'd like to know whether you recognise this gun. No, don't touch it."

Blackie looked at it fixedly.

"I'll be——if it isn't mine," he said. He looked up and caught Roberts' eye.

"What the hell are you grinning at?" he asked savagely; and HHH saw that he had been right enough in thinking that no love was lost between Blackie and the keeper. But before the latter could reply, he said sharply:

"Can you explain how this gun came to be lying beside a dead man up in the fields—by the footpath to the village?"

"Dead—up in—no."

The man looked wildly at the other three; again he fixed his eye on the keeper.

"Most like Roberts killed the feller and put my gun beside 'im," he burst out.

"Steady, steady," said Huskisson. "That'll do, Roberts," as the keeper stepped threateningly forwards; and to Blackie, "None of that. If you've any reason to think anything of the kind, you'll have your chance to say it, at the proper time. And you'll have your say, too, Roberts. I'll just step inside the lodge, Blackie, if you please."

The lodge-keeper, still very angry, made no move.

"I'll not have Roberts in there," he said, "nor yet hanging round here neither."

"It's a lie!" shouted Roberts, loudly if irrelevantly.

"Constable," Huskisson ordered sharply, "take Roberts down to the village. The other constable ought to be down there pretty soon; when he arrives,

he'll look after Roberts and you'll come back here."

The game-keeper was led away, muttering.

"Now what's all the trouble?" the Inspector asked Blackie, and as the man shuffled his feet rather sheepishly, his face still red with suppressed fury, a very pretty young woman appeared at the door of the lodge.

"What is it, George?" she asked nervously.

"Oh, is *that* it?" Huskisson demanded.

"Yes, blast 'im. Just comin', me dear."

Huskisson laughed, quietly, at the change of tone between the two replies.

CHAPTER XXIII

TWO KEEPERS

A word or two more with Blackie as they moved towards the door of the lodge finally satisfied the Inspector as to the cause of the strained relations with Roberts—namely, the pretty woman who stood waiting them in the living-room.

She said nothing, but looked at her husband in anxious enquiry.

"Man been found dead up in the meadows," said the latter gruffly, "and Roberts says he found my gun alongside him."

Her red cheeks lost most of their colour.

"Your gun—well indeed, George—but——" And she plunged into an incoherent speech which revealed only one thing, by its accent and its cadences, that Mrs. Blackie hailed from North Wales.

"It's all right, girl," her husband assured her. "I never done it," and turning to Huskisson he demanded to know when the dead man had been killed.

"That I can't say," was the reply. "The best plan would be for you—if you're ready to make a statement—to tell me how you spent yesterday evening."

"That's easy," said Blackie. "I was here—eh, Mary?"

"Yes, George."

Huskisson suggested that a little more precision was wanted. At seven o'clock now?

" At seven," Blackie repeated thoughtfully. " Why, I was here then. It was just then the Colonel called me. You heard him, didn't you, girl ? "

" Yes, indeed. I was in the kitchen, sir, cooking the supper, and I heard the Colonel call and then he came into the lodge and spoke with George."

" That's it." The lodge-keeper nodded vigorous assent. " Smokin' a pipe, I was. The Colonel was just outside—must have come on the grass for I never heard a footstep. Then he called out, loud, too—' You there, Blackie ? ' I said yes, and before I could as much as put me pipe down he opened the door and stepped in."

" Well ? Go on."

" What, about the Colonel ? Very good. Well, the Colonel he says to me he thinks he saw someone in the spinney down the road, and would I just take a look round. Picnickers, he thought it was. You should see the litter some days. And he says he wonders where Roberts is."

" And where was he ? "

Blackie scowled, glanced quickly at his wife and said :

" In the pub, most likely, I should say. But of course I didn't say as much to the Colonel. I just got up and said I'd have a look round. And just as I was going he stops me and says, ' I suppose it couldn't have been Mrs. Blackie I saw ? ' "

Mrs. Blackie's cheeks were now as red as they had been white a few minutes before. Blackie seemed to have some difficulty in continuing his story.

" I—I was pretty sure the wife was in the kitchen," he said at last. " Cookin' the supper and that. Still, I'd not heard a sound that I remembered, and well—I'll admit

—I wondered. And I glanced at the clock there, just past seven, it was. I marked it, thinkin' to meself that the wife was in the kitchen for sure."

"And so I was, George."

"Yes, girl, I know you were." His tone was a mixture of apology for himself and forgiveness for her.

"And then?" Huskisson demanded relentlessly, though he realised that it would be a mistake to hurry the man.

"Then the Colonel and me steps into the passage and I pops my head in the kitchen and there was the wife. So I told her I'd be back in a brace of shakes and went off to the spinney."

"Yes," said Mrs. Blackie, before Huskisson could stop her and get on to a more critical time of the evening, "and the Colonel looked in and spoke to me. Always very kindly he is, though he did stand with the door open. And then he shut it and I heard him walk down the passage and out of the door, and I heard his steps crunching on the drive."

"I see," said Huskisson, "then that seems clear. Now let's hear what you did next."

"Went to the spinney," said Blackie aggrievedly, "and not a sign of anyone could I see. Pretty near half-an-hour I spent there, and friends comin' to supper too."

"Oh, friends," asked Huskisson. "Who were they?"

Mrs. Blackie gave him the names of a couple who lived in the village. "Coming to hear the wireless," she added. "And they met George at the gate and all came together, just as I was afraid the supper was going to be all spoilt."

The Inspector elicited the further information that the couple had arrived at seven-thirty " or as near as no matter " and had stayed till ten o'clock. And after their departure the Blackies had retired to bed.

" I just saw them off," said the lodge-keeper, " and came straight back."

No, they had heard no sound of a shot, but then the wireless had been in full blast. Huskisson was inclined to agree that the Military Band, on a rather rattly loud-speaker, in the cosy but small living-room, would have almost drowned a howitzer in the drive.

He reflected that though Blackie's alibi after ten o'clock depended entirely on his wife's evidence, on the other hand it was reasonable to suppose that Crowther had been murdered some time before that. If the friends from the village corroborated his story, he seemed to be entirely cleared. But then there was his gun.

" Your story seems straight enough," he told the couple, " but how did your gun get there ? When did you miss it ? "

Blackie shook his head.

" I never did miss it," he said. " You could've knocked me down with a feather when I saw it on your arm. D'you know what become it, girl ? "

" Why, George, and haf you forgotten that you took it to the spinney ? "

" I never," he said, evidently surprised.

" Yes, indeed," she insisted. " When you were so long coming back and I went to the door to look, I saw the gun was not there."

There was a silence, then the lodge-keeper again and stoutly asserted that his wife must be mistaken.

Huskisson, too, was puzzled ; for one thing was certain, that the murder was not committed between seven and half-past, when Crowther was safely at supper in the inn. He asked where the gun was usually kept, and was shown a couple of pegs in the hall-passage. From one of them hung a canvas cartridge bag ; he noticed that it was fastened by a strap. Mrs. Blackie was watching his every movement, and here observed, as if in further corroboration of her story, that her husband had left the case unfastened and she had done it up again.

Blackie rounded on her savagely.

" It's a lie," he shouted. " I never took the gun. It's just this —— wants to get me out of the way, so's she can take up with that —— Roberts."

Mrs. Blackie flared up too, and the Inspector had to intervene once more to restore peace by menaces. There might, of course, be something in Blackie's theory ; Roberts might know a good deal more about the business than he had admitted. But so, of course, might Blackie, and the best course seemed to be to conduct him, too, to the village. The lodge-keeper offered no physical resistance, though all the way he gave free and violent expression to his views about Roberts, nor did the Inspector's wise advice to him to " wait and see before he formed an opinion " succeed in soothing him.

They were almost at the village when they met the constable, returning to the lodge in accordance with instructions. Huskisson entrusted Blackie to his charge, adding a word of warning to keep him apart from the game-keeper. He himself set off in search of the couple who had supped at the lodge the previous evening ;

the man was away at work, but his wife was at the cottage and fully and readily corroborated the story which had been told to the Inspector.

Huskisson thought that he could with advantage devote a moment or two to quiet contemplation ; he fancied that at the village inn he would be anything but free from interruption. So he strolled a little way down a lane till he reached a gate on which he perched himself ; he lit a pipe and sucked contentedly at it.

It seemed clear enough that neither Roberts nor Blackie could have killed Crowther, at all events assuming, as it seemed safe to do, that the valet had been killed at something like nine o'clock. This point could be established finally, he thought, if any of the villagers—say, the couples in the lane down which Crowther had passed on his last walk—had heard the fatal shot or had any idea of the time when they had heard it. This, obviously, was the next thing to investigate.

If Roberts and Blackie were both of them cleared, then came the question of Blackie's gun. If Roberts had not taken it as a means of throwing suspicion on his enemy at the lodge, and if Blackie had not used it himself, then . . . Huskisson, pipe in mouth, made his way briskly to the inn, where he found that his forces had been strengthened by the arrival of a sergeant from the local station. To him was promptly given the task of interrogating some of those " couples," whilst Huskisson himself telephoned to Prince's Bay. He learnt with rather mixed feelings that the Chief Inspector, the Superintendent and Sergeants Overbury and Brewin had started a few moments before for Dennisford.

" Be thankful for small mercies," he murmured to himself when he heard that the Chief Constable had declined to join the expedition, out of regard for the proverbial dangers of a surfeit of chefs. He summoned Hodges, the landlord, and arranged for an upstairs room to be available for the forthcoming conference.

Village life has its advantages, sometimes ; that morning, the tendency of everyone to know everyone else's business served the Sergeant's purpose very well. With remarkable celerity he brought to the inn a grinning, bashful youth, snatched from the " general grocery " shop.

" Aye," he admitted, nervously tugging at his ear, " I wuz in the lane by Manners' farm last evenin', with me young lady. It's all proper," he added, " we're walkin' aout."

Huskisson explained, smiling, that he did not want to enquire into the morals of the matter ; he only hoped that he had not been too preoccupied to notice—or hear—anything except the young lady in question. In other words, had he heard a shot ?

" Well now. A shot ? Aye." He remembered that Lizzie had been startled, and he tugged his ear again and grinned yet more broadly. The time ? Ah. Now that was asking something. A loud report, it was, and quite near at hand, and he rather wondered who was shooting rabbits at that time, and whether Roberts had heard it. Yes, he'd seen Roberts standing at the door of the inn, just going inside, at about eight o'clock. But the time when he heard the shot—no, he couldn't say.

However, Huskisson did extract the definite information that the young man and his young lady had

returned to their respective homes by half-past ten, or a bit sooner, and that certainly they had heard the shot an hour before that. He thanked him and returned him to his duties at the shop, and despatched the Sergeant in search of further witnesses. Still, he was now fairly satisfied that Crowther had been killed round about nine o'clock ; in other words, that he had gone straight to that shed, and had been shot almost immediately he reached it. It was very hard to suppose that his shooting had been an accident, so that it seemed reasonable to think that the valet had had a definite prearranged programme, and that his visit to Dennisford was not a mere fortuitous one. Huskisson had had half an idea that Blackie was the guilty man and that Roberts had been cast for the rôle of victim ; but the evidence seemed to rule this out.

His meditations were interrupted by the sound of a car drawing up outside the inn. Looking down from the window he saw that it was the Prince's Bay party and hurried down to meet them. A minute or two later the five men were seated round the table in their conference room and Huskisson was rapidly relating the progress which he had made.

" It looks to me, sir," he concluded, " as if Crowther came over here on purpose—say to meet someone ; and that that person—or another—had it in for him. I don't think it can be Blackie, in spite of its being his gun, and if you agree, I'd be disposed to let him go—and the game-keeper too. On the other hand, it does look to me as if it's someone who's pretty familiar with the neighbourhood and, for that matter, with the inside of that lodge. If Blackie goes in much for these supper parties we'll have plenty of alibis to check."

After a brief consultation, it was agreed that the two men should be released from their detention. Huskisson left the room to give the necessary orders and also to take the opportunity to deliver to each man a pretty homily on the need to patch up their quarrel, lest they should find themselves in further trouble. He could not however flatter himself that his words were likely to have much effect.

As soon as he had left the room the Chief Inspector and the Superintendent looked at one another significantly.

"It's all working in nicely," said the former, "though we don't know yet what's the connection between the fellow and this village."

The two sergeants maintained a silence which in Brewin's case had the appearance of being a respectful one.

The Inspector came back and the conference was resumed, in a quiet, matter-of-fact tone which would sadly have disappointed the innkeeper if he had heard it; that worthy, however, was too occupied by pleasant anticipation of the roaring trade he would do later in the day, to waste his time in curiosity.

"We seem to have got a clear-cut problem to tackle first," the Chief Inspector said, addressing himself mainly to Huskisson, and leaning forward, his arms on the rather rickety table, "and the centre of it is—Carter."

"Sergeant Brewin was right, then, sir," the Inspector said, to the obvious satisfaction both of the Sergeant and of the Superintendent, "and you connect Carter's disappearance with Crowther's?"

"Seems very likely, doesn't it?"

" Yes. But d'you suggest that Carter did the job or that we shall find Carter—well, as we've found Crowther ? "

The other four exchanged glances.

" The chances are that Carter's the man we want," said the Chief Inspector.

" I gather, sir," said Huskisson rather stiffly (and Sergeant Overbury's lip twitched) " that you're in possession of new facts. As far as *I* know, it might be possible to account for Carter's disappearance and Crowther's murder in the same way—that they knew too much about the Anderson business ; but it wouldn't follow that Carter did in Crowther, or that he'd get off lighter than Crowther."

" Yes, Inspector. There's another fact. Crowther's body was found, wasn't it, just on the edge of Colonel Travers' property ? Quite so. Now—Carter got his job at the car-park on the strength of a letter of recommendation signed ' Graham Travers.' "

" Colonel Travers ! " Huskisson exclaimed. " By Jove, sir. And he's away. Left yesterday evening. I haven't had time——"

He stopped, frowning ; Sergeant Overbury's smile was unconcealed.

" Signed Graham Travers, but the signature was a forgery," the Chief Inspector concluded. " Sergeant Overbury got on to it."

The smile became triumphant ; Overbury, in mock modesty, lowered his eyes and looked down his long pointed nose.

" So the question is," Superintendent Hawkins put in his oar, " who is this fellow Carter and what is—or was—his connection with Dennisford ? "

" I'd better get the Sergeant back," said Huskisson, concealing his mortification at the course of events ; he was boiling with anger at the way in which he'd done all the work, only for the unpleasant Overbury to pick up this bit of evidence behind his back, as it were. " He's checking evidence as to the time when Crowther was shot."

" Yes," said the Chief Inspector briefly.

" Unless," Huskisson added, " I went up to Colonel Travers' house to find out how we can get in touch with him. And possibly his housekeeper could help us over Carter's identity too."

But his superiors decided that the Sergeant was more likely to help ; and it slightly restored his good humour when that worthy, released from his interrogation of courting couples, was quite unable to connect Carter, from the descriptions given of him, with any present or past inhabitant of Dennisford.

" Well, we'd better try the housekeeper, then," the Chief Inspector concluded ; and Huskisson ostentatiously and annoyingly glanced at his wrist-watch.

CHAPTER XXIV

A THIRD KIND

Huskisson appropriated the Chief Inspector as his companion in the Chrysler and, the other three following in the Prince's Bay car, set off for the Colonel's house.

The distance was comparatively short and gave him but little opportunity to expound his views or to discover the Chief's. The lodge-gates were shut, but a blast of the horn brought Mrs. Blackie quickly forth, and the gates were opened if not with a friendly smile at least with *empressement*. The little procession swept up the winding drive and came to a halt in front of a very attractive half-timbered house ; the most inexpert eye could hardly have failed to observe its difference from those " Tudor-style residences " of which house-agents hope so much to-day. The five men grouped themselves in front of the door and Superintendent Hawkins firmly rang the bell—no modern electric affair but a stout iron handle ; somewhere within the house a bell jangled faintly. They waited ; the Chief Inspector stepped to one side and peered into a window close to the door ; but he could get no clear view of the interior.

The Superintendent rang again, rather more violently, and after another pause a casement window on the first floor, almost directly above the front door, was

opened and a head thrust out. They stared up and Huskisson at least felt that he was staring at the ghost of Jezebel. The old lady's face was in shadow, while the sunlight fell full on theirs ; yet even so it was easy to detect its chief characteristics, of powder, rouge and wrinkles. An imposing edifice of grey hair—too imposing to be wholly natural—was crowned by a peculiar lace cap, such as one associates with the housekeepers of old-fashioned farces. The eyes were keen enough—almost fierce. Round her neck was a wide band of black velvet, which was fastened (or at least decorated) in front with a brilliant paste brooch, and was met by a fussy lace collar not unlike a shrunken Elizabethan ruff. She was clad, so far as the group below could see, in black silk.

" What do you want ? " she demanded ; her singular voice was at once hoarse, ferocious and elaborately refined.

" We'd like to see Colonel Travers," the Chief Inspector replied politely.

" Well, you can't. He's away." And she began to draw in her head.

" Quite so," the Chief Inspector went on, and she paused. " We thought that perhaps you could help us. We're from Scotland Yard."

" Indeed," said the old lady, seemingly very little impressed, " That's a pretty story, isn't it ? Why didn't you bring along that good-for-nothing Sergeant from the village, then ? "

" Why—really, ma'am——" The Chief Inspector was genuinely taken aback by the common sense of her enquiry.

" Pooh, my good fellow," she proceeded, scornfully.

" You would have done better to say you had come to inspect the gas meter. Now be off. There's a telephone here, you know, and besides there's a bell that rings in the lodge."

So little was she alarmed by the appearance of what she clearly judged to be a gang of thieves, that she made no further move to close the window but remained staring at them with a sardonic smile which revealed a remarkably good set of teeth.

" Certainly ring up the Police Station, ma'am," said the Chief Inspector equably enough. " We'll wait till the Sergeant turns up " ; and he took a cigarette-case from his pocket, helped himself to a cigarette and offered one to the Superintendent.

The old lady's expression became more serious and thoughtful.

" What is it all supposed to be about ? " she asked.

" Man found murdered not far from here, on Colonel Travers' property," she was briskly informed.

" Roberts found the body, Mrs. Capstick "—Huskisson put in his oar—" and beside it was Blackie's gun. So you see that the Colonel is—well, interested."

" You're very glib with your names, young man," she observed, rather grimly. " Still, I think I'll just ring up and ask who you all are " ; and with that she disappeared from view and the window was shut.

There was a silence ; the policemen looked at one another and smiled.

" Can't blame the old body," the Chief Inspector addressed the Superintendent, " but I hope she won't waste much more of our time or we shall have to do something drastic."

Silence fell again ; they seemed to catch the sound of a faint tinkle, as if Mrs. Capstick was indeed telephoning. A moment or two later, shuffling steps approached the front door ; there was the sound of the shooting back of bolts and the turning of a lock, and the door was slowly opened to reveal Mrs. Capstick standing in a rather dark hall.

" Apparently you are what you say you are," she informed them, not very graciously, " unless there's two troupes touring the country. You had better come in. But wipe your boots," she added, sharply, " and don't litter the drive with those cigarettes. There's an ash-tray here."

Even the Chief Inspector felt rather sheepish—a sentiment which their fuller view of the old lady did something to increase. She was unusually tall, though she had a noticeable stoop ; the length of her black skirt—ornamented by an old-fashioned chatelaine—counteracted the effect of the stoop. She was by no means so thin as the vision of her wrinkled face at the window had led them to expect. She held her arms not folded but crossed in front of her, hand clasping elbow.

She stood aside as they entered and kept a sharp eye to see that her boot-wiping instructions were not disregarded ; she stood almost behind the door, and as soon as they were inside she shut it ; her long black sleeve finished in a lace cuff as elaborately Elizabethan as her collar.

" First door on the right ; that's the library," she said ; " we had best talk in there."

Sergeant Brewin hastened to turn the handle ; as the door was locked he failed in his intention, which was

to throw it briskly open to admit the Chief Inspector and the Superintendent. By the time that he had unlocked it, Mrs. Capstick was heading the queue which awaited admission ; a severe glance and a tilt of the eyebrow had plainly reminded " these policemen " that Britain's motto is " Ladies First." They followed meekly in her wake. She stood—" took up her stance " would better describe it—in front of a bookcase built into the wall between the two windows. Thin green silk curtains were drawn over the latter, and the library, a pleasant, book-lined, well-lived-in room, swam in green gloom. Two arm-chairs and a sofa were swathed in white covers and looked quite ghostly.

Sergeant Overbury advanced to the first window and laid his hand on the curtain, as if to draw it.

" Don't touch that." Mrs. Capstick stopped him sharply. " *I'm* in charge here and I don't intend the Colonel to come back and find all his books faded and ruined."

The Sergeant glanced at the Chief Inspector, who with a slight shrug and smile indicated that he saw no reason to disobey the old lady's orders. She nodded, as if satisfied that even policemen had their good points ; she remained standing and evidently expected them to do the same.

" And *now*," she said, " let me hear exactly what you want to know. If you think that either Roberts or Blackie would deliberately shoot a man, you're mistaken. They've only just got spirit enough to be jealous of one another."

" No doubt, ma'am," began the Chief Inspector.

" I can tell you all about them," she continued, taking no notice of his comment.

" What I *want*," he interrupted her, slightly nettled and in a note of authority, " is to get in touch with Colonel Travers. I understand he is away ? "

" He is. He went abroad yesterday."

" Abroad ? Yesterday ? "

Four of the five men showed signs of distinct interest, the exception being Sergeant Brewin, whose eye was wandering rather vacantly round the room.

" Surely I spoke plainly," said Mrs. Capstick. " Colonel Travers set off yesterday by car for Southampton ; he arranged to do so some time ago. He usually goes abroad at this time of the year."

" He made a late start, didn't he ? " asked Huskisson.

She looked at him with an expression which invited him to explain himself at once ; he complied.

" He spoke to Blackie at the lodge at about seven o'clock."

" So he told me. He thought he saw picnickers on the estate. He told Blackie to turn them off because he himself wanted to start for Southampton. There is " (she adopted the tone of a patient governess addressing an unusually stupid infant) " a night boat."

" H'm. So there is," said the Chief Inspector, " but as far as I remember the boat sails about midnight. When did the Colonel leave ? "

" About a quarter past seven," Mrs. Capstick replied calmly.

" Left plenty of time, didn't he ? " Again Huskisson risked a rebuff, and duly received it.

" Even a Colonel may dine, I suppose. The Colonel dined at eight-thirty, at Bournemouth."

" How d'you——"

" The Colonel telephoned to me from there. He had

forgotten his cigar holder ; he missed it after he had dined, whilst listening to the orchestra. Bournemouth is well known for its musical entertainments."

Huskisson was conscious that the rest of the forces of law and order were regarding him with covert amusement, and he flushed and abandoned the duel. He had formed a theory about that gun of Blackie's, and the telephone call, if it had not been faked, seemed to prove clearly enough that his theory had been wrong ; the Colonel could not have been by that tumbled-down hut at nine o'clock. He turned away and moved aimlessly towards the empty fireplace.

The Chief Inspector proceeded, in a deferential tone calculated to overcome Mrs. Capstick's obvious dislike for the whole business, to ask how he could get in touch with the Colonel. She graciously dictated a series of not very helpful addresses of the Poste Restante variety in various parts of Italy and France.

" Begins to look," the Chief Inspector, having warmly thanked her, said to Superintendent Hawkins, " as if we can't wait to get in touch with Colonel Graham Travers. I wonder whether Mrs. Capstick could help us to identify this man Carter ? "

" Who is he, pray ? " the old lady demanded. She continued to stand stiffly upright, her arms folded in her peculiar way, which gave her the appearance of perpetually restraining a shiver of contempt.

The Superintendent, aided by Sergeant Brewin, gave her a description. Huskisson turned again towards the rest of the group to listen to the description ; as he did so, his elbow moved a silver-framed photograph which stood on the mantelpiece. Mrs. Capstick's eagle eye observed it.

" Be careful, young man," she said.

The Chief Inspector threw an angry glance at the cause of the interruption ; Sergeant Overbury looked his most impertinent.

" No harm done," Huskisson assured her, airily, and added, as he straightened the photograph, " Is the Colonel married ? ' Charlie from Mabel.' He's Charlie, I suppose ? "

" The Colonel is *not* married," the housekeeper answered, acidly.

" Come, come, Inspector," Superintendent Hawkins broke out. " Don't waste time."

" Hold on," the Chief Inspector said sharply. " I'm not sure that he is. Is Colonel Graham Travers's Christian name Charles, ma'am ? " he asked.

" Certainly it is."

The others looked at him in surprise. There was a brief silence. Then he jerked his head impatiently and told them to get on with their description of Carter. Mrs. Capstick pursed her lips as she listened, and at the end she shook her head.

" You don't recognise the man ? " the Superintendent asked in a disappointed tone.

" Not myself. But from the description it sounds to me very like a good-for-nothing who came to see the Colonel some months ago. I believe it is called the ' Old Soldier ' trick. I did not see him myself, nor did the Colonel. It happened that neither of us was in. The parlourmaid very foolishly admitted him to this room."

She stopped abruptly.

" Well, ma'am ? "

" That is all I can tell you."

"Yes, but—you mean this man just went away again?"

"Certainly. He took nothing, if that is what you mean. In fact, I believe he said he would come back another day. But I have no doubt he had some evil intention; for the Colonel was quite unable to identify him from the parlourmaid's description." She paused and coughed. "Not that it was a very good description," she added.

The Chief Inspector glanced significantly at Sergeant Overbury, who produced the letter from Colonel Travers on the strength of which Carter had secured his temporary job at the car-park.

"Do you recognise the writing, Mrs. Capstick?"—and the paper was handed to her.

"Good gracious! Why, it's the Colonel's writing," she exclaimed, shaken out of her stiff reserve at last. "But why in the world——"

"It's all right, ma'am," the Superintendent reassured her; "we're satisfied that letter is a forgery. The notepaper is what the man wanted here, I expect, and a sample of writing."

The Chief Inspector and the others of the London contingent were rather taken aback by the Superintendent's anxiety for the old lady's feelings. However, whether in reward for his courtesy or not, she became a good deal more forthcoming, and manifested a desire to help them to lay hands on Carter. It was very unfortunate that the household had all been sent on holiday and she herself was going that very day; still, she would give them the parlourmaid's address, and no doubt enquiries in the neighbourhood would produce someone who had set eyes on Carter.

" It wouldn't surprise me if he's played the same trick in other houses." The Superintendent was clearly disposed to share her view.

After a few further minutes of talk, the old lady departed in search of the " household address book." This time Sergeant Brewin, taking his cue from the tone of his superiors towards the old lady, politely opened the door for her. As it closed behind her, conversation became brisk and lively, though Inspector Huskisson took little part in it ; there was evidently a tacit agreement that he was all at sea. How to get on Carter's track—that was the thing. He could hardly have gone far since nine o'clock the previous night.

Huskisson however had no intention of being disregarded.

" I suppose you're satisfied that Carter *is* still in existence ? " he suddenly demanded, rather loudly. " And are you *sure* that letter's a forgery ? "

" You've only got to use a magnifying glass," the Chief Inspector said impatiently, answering only his second question, and he turned again to the Superintendent.

Huskisson beckoned to Brewin to come to the mantelpiece, and pointed to a photograph—a group this time.

" See that photo ? " he asked quietly.

" What, those theatricals ? "

" Yes. *Pirates of Penzance*—no, it's *Treasure Island*, I should say."

" Well, sir ? "

" Who's that in the middle ? See a likeness ? "

The Sergeant gingerly removed the group and examined it closely.

" It's—it certainly is very like Carter," he said, raising his voice in his excitement, " though it may be just the black patch that does it."

The others had turned sharply at the Sergeant's words.

" I think there's more than that to it," Huskisson opined ; as he spoke the door opened again and Mrs. Capstick, a brown book in her hand, entered. She stopped short at the sight of Brewin holding the photograph.

" Really ! " she said. " The moment my back's turned——"

" Had to pass the time while you were finding that book." Huskisson again used his airiest tone.

" I can't run upstairs as quickly as I once could," she replied.

" I don't think the Inspector meant that, ma'am." Superintendent Hawkins hastened to soothe her again. But the Inspector snatched the photograph from Brewin's hands and with a couple of strides handed it to the housekeeper.

" That's Colonel Travers in the middle, isn't it ? " he demanded.

The effect was unmistakable, and the others followed closer in Huskisson's wake. Mrs. Capstick struggled for composure and her voice was huskier than ever when finally she admitted that the Inspector was right.

The Chief Inspector in turn took the photograph, looked at it closely and cleared his throat. His face was grave.

" Carter ? " he asked, of Brewin and Huskisson.

" Or his double," said the latter, in a tone of conviction.

" Then we shall have to trouble you further." The Chief Inspector abandoned all pretence at suavity, and became nearly menacing.

" Overbury, you and Sergeant—er—Brewin, yes—had better look through the house."

Sergeant Overbury, startled by the new turn, stepped smartly forward and into the hall, almost pushing Mrs. Capstick aside.

" I insist on being present if a search is to be made," said the old lady, apparently too much upset in mind to notice the Sergeant's discourtesy, and she turned to follow. In so doing she almost collided with Brewin, who was trying to dodge his way past her. She stumbled, and while Brewin was profuse in apology, Inspector Huskisson showed himself a man of quick action by catching her by the forearm.

" Hold up, ma'am," he said, genially, and then " Hullo ! " and he maintained and tightened his hold, and stared hard at the old lady ; for all her rouge and powder, she seemed to redden under his stare.

" Inspec——" the Chief began to expostulate, and then Mrs. Capstick broke violently from Huskisson's grip and sprang into the hall with a very unexpected agility.

" Hold him ! " shouted Huskisson, and a second or two later he and the two Sergeants were holding an unresisting prisoner, whose grey wig had gone sadly astray to reveal—not the bald head of an elderly housekeeper but the close-cropped head of a middle-aged Colonel.

" I was—afraid you'd get me," he panted, " but—you're too late."

He collapsed suddenly in their arms.

" Yes, sir. Swallowed something. Had it in her—his hand," Sergeant Brewin reported unemotionally.

" Hell ! " said the Chief Inspector and dashed to the telephone.

CHAPTER XXV

"ALONE I DID IT"

"Altogether a tiresome case," said the Chief Inspector, to Inspectors Huskisson and Augur a few days later ; it was his practice to hold an informal conference at the end of a case—a "post mortem" is what a bridge player no doubt would call it.

"Tiresome," he went on, "from many points of view. First of all, there's an unusual amount of clearing up to do. Anderson's widow ; his servants, who for that matter were more or less Crowther's dependants ; that inventor, Muirfield, and his wife—I think we can safely assume he stole back his plans, since they weren't in the office safe ; that's one job saved. Then there's Anderson's office ; and last but not least Godfrey and his uncle, and all the other unfortunate victims of Anderson. Curious that the murder of a blackmailer is so inconvenient for the people he's been blackmailing ; I almost believe it's much worse than putting him in gaol."

"And the Colonel's household," added Augur, feelingly.

"Oh, yes," the Chief agreed, smiling, "but that's not so much our job as the lawyer's, thank goodness. Well, then there's the next aspect ; here's a double murderer and we failed to take him alive. We allow him to poison himself when he's surrounded by

policemen. For that," he added handsomely, "I'm mainly to blame."

"D'you think, sir, we'd have had evidence enough if he hadn't killed himself?" Augur asked.

"I think so. Yes, I certainly think so. The man's own behaviour alone—dismissing the servants, including the housekeeper, and then impersonating the housekeeper. Oh yes; he dismissed them all right. Though he told us, as Mrs. Capstick, that they were on holiday. Then he had the opportunity, as Huskisson realised, to take the gun from the lodge. That alibi—the telephone call from Bournemouth; that was a pure invention, after all, wasn't it? So that he had the opportunity to shoot Crowther and a better one than anyone else who was in any way involved. The photograph of him in which Huskisson at once saw the resemblance to Carter; we could no doubt have found plenty of people to identify it. The testimonial to 'Carter'—who had a better opportunity to forge it than the Colonel himself? He only had to write it out, turn it upside down and copy his own writing. Besides which we know now that the Town Clerk had said in the Colonel's hearing that he wanted one or two reliable ex-service men for temporary jobs during the Prince's Bay season. And then remember that the Colonel was away, though his household did not know where, precisely when 'Carter' was in evidence at Prince's Bay. And finally—there's the 'C. G. T.' entry in Anderson's ledger."

There was a short silence.

"You might add, sir, that Colonel Travers had had experience as a pig-sticker in India," said Huskisson, half seriously. The Chief Inspector nodded absently

and then resumed his survey, addressing himself rather to the ceiling than to his two subordinates.

"A tiresome case," he repeated, "because of the cross-currents. You may say that there was only one man who left no evidence against himself—and that was the murderer. I don't say the Muirfields and that writer—Godfrey, yes—were innocent; but they weren't guilty of murder, and the stuff they gave us to work on took us right off the highroad, so to speak."

"I suppose we ought to have spotted that Crowther was what you might call the key man," Huskisson suggested, somewhat to Augur's discomfort, for he had by no means forgotten the way in which Crowther had gone off on his own—never to return.

"I don't know," the Chief replied, slowly. "In a way I had that in the back of my mind; and now, of course, it seems plain enough. Mrs. Anderson practically employed the valet as her spy; and we knew that he'd put Godfrey up to Anderson's week-end plans. In other words, we knew that he was unreliable and that he knew a lot about his master's affairs. And yet I don't know what we could have done; as a matter of fact, he did the best he could to help us when he got himself murdered."

"What exactly is your reading of the part he played, sir?" Huskisson asked.

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"Pure guesswork, of course," he said, "but I should say that somehow or other he knew that Colonel Travers was the man whom Anderson meant to see on business when he went to Prince's Bay. Perhaps he overheard a telephone conversation, or opened a letter which he was given to post; or just noted the address."

"Hardly a telephone call, sir," Augur ventured to express his disagreement. "The London Telephone Service have no record of a call from Elder Place to Dennisford, and Crowther could hardly have listened in if the call had been put through from anywhere else."

"You're right," the Chief agreed. "Let's say then that it was a letter. I expect Crowther made a point of 'noticing' to whom Anderson wrote, though there's precious little in the way of notes amongst his belongings."

"D'you suppose he was actually a witness of the murder, sir?"

"No. I wouldn't go so far as that. Crowther's original plan, I should judge, was to blackmail his master. What he needed for that was evidence about the hotel, wasn't it? For of course he had no idea that the lady in the case had no intention of being the lady in the hotel. No, I should say that it was only after Anderson's murder that Crowther began to take a real interest in Colonel Travers. And then we made two mistakes—we didn't pay enough attention—or pay it soon enough—to the fact that Crowther had learnt of his master's death from that Prince's Bay S.O.S.; and in the second place, as luck would have it, we gave him a chance to go through the papers in the safe. He hadn't too much time—just while Porritt was telephoning—and he took a risk—a bigger one than he realised. But his game was simple; the papers which Anderson had used to blackmail Colonel Travers—they would not only in themselves enable Crowther to continue the business, but they were a piece of damning evidence against Travers, *quâ* murderer of

Anderson. Crowther meant to have two screws to turn."

"What's worse, sir," Huskisson put in, "we gave him the very excuse he wanted to skip down to Prince's Bay and call on the Colonel."

"We did. We couldn't help it—though we did rather overdo the 'free travel' idea," and the Chief Inspector flashed a glance at Augur.

"What surprises me, sir," said the latter, rather elaborately ignoring the look, "is that Travers thought it necessary to kill Crowther at all."

"Never can see that any murder is necessary myself," Huskisson murmured.

"I don't mean that——" Augur began, irritably.

The Chief's laughter brought him to a halt, rather red in the face, and angry that he had "risen" so quickly.

"I should say," the Chief answered the question, "that Travers' plan was not to hustle away directly after Anderson's murder. He had notice of the visit, obviously, because he had to get cash ready to pay over; he planned it carefully enough. 'Carter' was to murder Anderson, and then 'Carter' was to vanish. If the Police took any interest in Carter—they'd find that his references were forged. And they would *not* find that Colonel Travers had disappeared as quickly as 'Carter' or anything of the kind. He had arranged to leave quite quietly some days later; the outside staff were to be kept on, in the usual way. And then—out of the blue, so to speak, comes Crowther's telephone message from Prince's Bay—the very day before the Colonel had arranged to start for his 'holiday.'

"Of course, that made all the difference. He didn't

mean to leave England as a 'wanted' man—terrified by Crowther's message and so on. As we now know, he asked Mrs. Capstick to leave by a later train than she had intended and so was able to get her away—oh, she was quite innocent, that's pretty certain—under cover of darkness ; in fact, he drove her to the main-line station in his car, and left it in a garage and came back on foot. And the keepers imagined that the Colonel had gone and Mrs. Capstick had stayed. And that's what they told Huskisson, as Travers reckoned they would. Mrs. Capstick had a reputation for a sharp tongue—neither Blackie nor Roberts would be likely to go nosing about the house.

"So there we are. Crowther comes over to a place fixed by Travers, and at a time fixed by Travers : when the lodge-keeper is busy in the lodge, and the game-keeper in the pub, and all the servants have left the house, and no one is left but Mrs. Capstick, packing up her belongings. It didn't take Travers more than twenty minutes—and he walked back with the all-important papers in his pocket."

"That's why Crowther's pocket was inside out, then," said Huskisson. "Of course I didn't know about the mysterious C. G. T.," and he looked reproachfully at Augur.

"That's why," the Chief agreed. "And the rest you know. Travers took a big risk when he made up as his own housekeeper—the risk that one of the local police would be in our party. But then he was playing a desperate game. If he'd cut and run, that day or the night before, he was certain to be caught sooner or later ; he had no time to lay false trails ; the essence of his prepared plan to follow Anderson's murder had

been that Colonel Travers had nothing to conceal. Well, the alternative was to gamble on his ability as an actor—gain time, invent an alibi for the Colonel which would delay us, produce a false list of addresses and so forth. And it nearly came off."

"It was a good make-up," said Huskisson, "though I can't think why I didn't see through it."

"You remember how 'Mrs. Capstick' talked to us from the window?" the Chief went on. "That was to give us a chance to recognise her. If you had done—or Hawkins—well, the door was locked and bolted, and by the time we'd got in we shouldn't have found anyone living in the house. We didn't show signs of recognition; and we did talk about getting the local sergeant—so Travers decided to go through with it."

"He did it well, I gather?" Augur enquired.

"The rôle helped him. He played the fussy housekeeper—must keep the blinds drawn and so on. The get-up of course made him look a tall woman, instead of a medium-tall man. And the dress—remember how he kept his hands hidden, Huskisson? And shuffled, so as to keep his feet inside his skirt? And the rouge and powder were in keeping with the Mrs. Capstick he presented to us. The wrinkles were the riskiest—the worst of using chemicals to draw the skin is that the effect may work off too soon. Still, the rest of the make-up and the green blinds were there to cover the gelatine's retreat, so to speak."

He paused, then paid a warm tribute to Huskisson.

"If you hadn't spotted the man, he'd probably have got clean away. I'd be the last person to blame you for not spotting him sooner—you'd hardly set eyes on Carter, whereas Superintendent Hawkins and that

Prince's Bay sergeant had been hobnobbing with him for days. I hope it's taught them once and for all, that the only thing to do is to call in the Yard straight away."

Huskisson felt that he simply had not the face to swallow this whole.

"I don't think it's any credit to me, sir," he said. "It was just that Mrs. Capstick tripped up and I caught her arm. Well, no one could have failed to be surprised at such a forearm—considering the look of her, I mean. As for the rest of the case, sir," he went on hurriedly, "the real difficulty, if I may say so, has been that things have been moving, and moving fairly fast, in several places and in several directions, and we haven't all of us known enough about what was going on . . ."

Inspector Augur moved restlessly. This was a familiar opening, and infallibly, he knew, led to remarks about "some people being too much in the office and not trusting the man on the spot . . ." !

To Huskisson, of course, the "man on the spot" meant primarily himself, in the present instance, and secondly the Prince's Bay men, Hawkins and Brewin. He was glad to think (as the Chief started to moralise on "team-work") that at least he'd done the right thing by Brewin, and tried to give him all the credit he deserved for the donkey-work he'd put in. . . .

He would have been genuinely pained if he could have read Sergeant Brewin's mind at that moment, as he made his way, red faced and solitary, along the sands at Prince's Bay, on the look-out for a notorious pickpocket who was reported to be down on a little trip combining business with pleasure.

" Always the same," he thought to himself, " blackmail or murder or petty larceny. I do the dirty work, and no one thanks me. And when I spot a real winner, someone else takes the cash. Who but me tumbled to it that Carter was mixed up in that murder business? And if it hadn't been for me tripping the old lady, so to call her, would that feller Huskisson ever have tumbled to it who she was? And what do I get for it? "

Savagely he kicked a heap of sand and was roundly sworn at by a justly exasperated parent of five for " spoiling the kiddies' castle."